

PLUCK AND LUCK

COMPLETE
STORIES OF ADVENTURE.

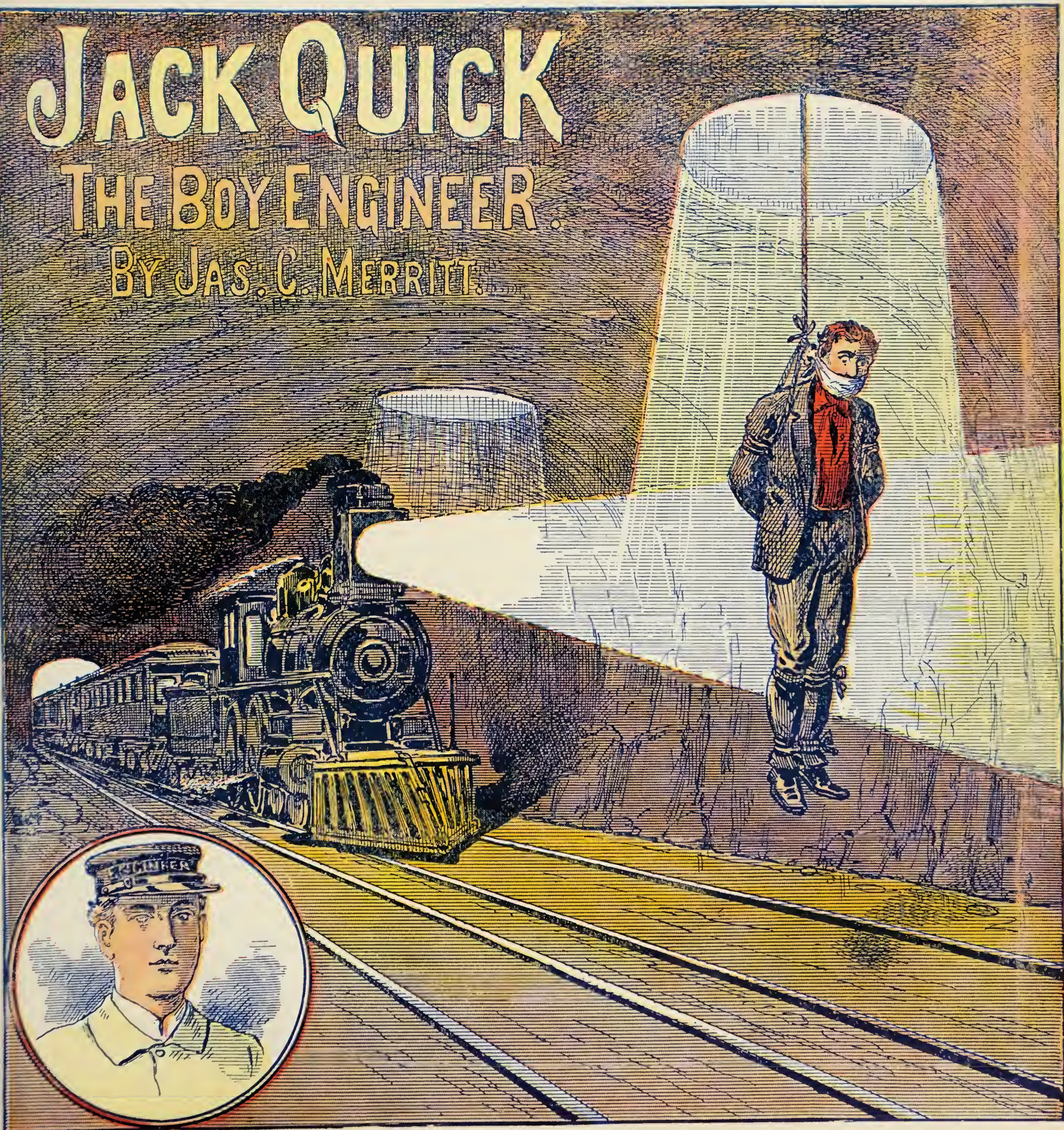
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No. 20.

NEW YORK, OCTOBER 5, 1898.

Price 5 Cents.

JACK QUICK THE BOY ENGINEER. BY JAS. C. MERRITT.



At that moment the engine leaps the narrow space which yet intervenes, and his form has not yet cleared the point of safety. Heaven help him now, for there is but the breadth of a hair between that young life and eternity!

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Jack Quick, the Boy Engineer.

BY JAS. C. MERRITT.

CHAPTER I.

JACK AND HIS PROTEGE—THE ACCIDENT.

JACK QUICK was one of the smartest boy engineers in all the West. Everybody said so, and what everybody says must, of course, be true.

But if everybody had not said so it would have been the truth all the same.

Jack Quick was an engineer on the Northern and Eastern Railway, a road running through some of the wildest country in the West.

It was of considerable importance on account of its terminal facilities, and the country through which it ran had been greatly increased in population since it had been built.

The Eastern terminus was a city of considerable size, which we shall call Preston, and this was Jack's place of residence.

The boy—he was between nineteen and twenty—was without parents, so far as he knew, and really never troubled himself to find out.

He lived with an old man, a miserly money-lender, known only by the name of Old Mose, and had never lived with any one else, as far as he knew.

He had seemed to take naturally to railroading, and had been a fireman when barely sixteen years of age, being tall and strong beyond his years.

He was now an engineer, and enjoyed the confidence of Mr. Simon Steele, president of the road; of Mr. Matthews, the general superintendent, and, in fact, of all with whom he came in contact.

Associated with Jack, and acting in the capacity of fireman, was a young fellow of eighteen, strong and robust, and of medium height, called Matt Briggs, though only a few people knew his surname, which he very seldom used.

Matt was a rough diamond, and had been a street Arab until Jack picked him up and showed him that he had a future before him if he only took the pains to make it, and Matt, in consequence, became Jack's devoted friend from that time forth.

Jack had been going home one evening when, on passing the gallery door of the Preston Theater, he had been accosted by Matt with:

"Say, young feller, lend us a nickel, will yer, to go to der show. I've got der rest."

"Lend it to you? I might as well give it, right out."

"Guess yer right, young feller, but it sounds better to say lend."

"What do you do for a living?"

"Sells papers, shines boots, carries baggage, anything I kin find to do."

"Do you spend all your evenings at the theater?"

"Ain't missed a show five years. Go every night in the week if der theayter is open. Other nights I take in der free-and-easys."

"Why don't you stay home sometimes, of nights?"

"Home!" repeated the other in disgust. "I'd sooner be kicked, and so I would be, if I hung around dere very much."

"Why don't you go to night school, then, and learn something? Do you know anything at all?"

"I kin read and write, and count my money when I get any. Dey can't cheat me, dey can't."

"Can you keep books?" asked Jack, with a smile.

"Never gets any lent to me. All I gets to read is der papers."

"Do you like to read?"

"Bet yer life! I used ter go to der lib'ry and read, but dey fired me out 'cause I wasn't dressed good."

"If I bought you a suit of clothes, would you spend your evenings in reading-rooms and at night school?"

"What! not go to der theayter at all?"

"Occasionally. What are they doing here, to-night?"

"Der 'Idiot Detective; or, Der Murder at der Mill.' Dey's two murderers and a fire, and a boss railroad snap in it. Tell ye what, it's bully."

"Do you ever see any of Shakespeare's plays?"

"Seen 'em all, mostly—'Hamlet,' 'Richard Three Times,' 'Ot'ello,' 'Macbeth,' 'King Lear,' and a lot more. De're bully pieces, but I likes a variety."

"You don't save up any money?"

"What's de use? Pop'd get it and go on a drunk wid it. No, I never save nothin'. Spends it on myself and gets der good of it."

"Suppose I should give you a chance to earn good wages, and keep them, too; to learn something, be decently dressed, and have a pleasant home, where you wouldn't be kicked and cuffed about, would you take it?"

"Well, I should snicker! Are yer givin' me gum-drops, or do you mean business?"

"I mean business. What is your name?"

"Matt Briggs."

"Mine is Jack Quick, and I'm an engineer on the Northern and Eastern. Will you go with me now?"

"Dey ain't no coddin' about it?"

"No, Matt, I'm as square as a brick. You've got good stuff in you, and it's a pity to let it run to waste."

"If you're an engineer, ye're just der man I want ter know, 'cause dat's der business I'm lookin' fur. Steer ahead, Mr. Jack. Ye're de fust bloke what ever talked business ter me, an' I'm goin' ter catch on solid."

"All right; but don't use so much slang. The language is good enough, if you only knew it, without picking up catch words."

"All right, young feller. You're der boss now, an' I'll go whichever way yer steer, on'y don't try to reform me all at onct."

Jack did not indeed, but brought his pupil along by easy stages until, before Matt was even aware of it himself, a great change had come over him, and he was quite a different boy at the end of a year from what he had been when Jack had first met him.

At the end of that time Jack took him as his fireman, for he had

once occupied that humble position himself, and Matt was perfectly willing to begin at the bottom of the ladder, and not try to make a flying jump at the middle and perhaps miss, and have to go back to the beginning after all.

Matt had been firing for Jack about eight months, when one night in winter—early in January—an incident happened which was destined to materially affect the lives of both boys, and which was the beginning of the numerous adventures I am about to chronicle in the life of my hero.

Jack was returning to Preston, and had just reached the entrance to the tunnel, at the further end of which the station was situated, when, without a warning, he suddenly saw a train just ahead of him, and on the same track.

He had received no signal to slow up, and was therefore running at his usual rate of speed, which would send him crashing into the train ahead.

There was no time to check his speed, and on a down grade it would take longer than otherwise, and he knew, therefore, that a crash was inevitable.

He stood at his post, calling upon Matt to do the same, and did what he could to avert the disaster, shoving the throttle in, and throwing the lever to the center, at the same time calling for brakes.

In another instant he struck the rear car of the train ahead, throwing it from the track, and damaging his engine somewhat.

A scene of the wildest confusion ensued, for, before the engine could be brought to a stand-still, it had plunged through the wrecked car and split it completely in half, the rubbish catching on fire in a moment.

Jack leaped from his engine, and at that moment he heard a piercing cry for help from the middle of the wrecked car.

By the fierce light of the burning coach, he saw a young lady, imprisoned by the fallen timbers, vainly endeavoring to extricate herself, the flames rapidly encroaching upon her, and threatening to reach her in a few seconds.

Leaping forward, the brave fellow tore away the rubbish, and, seizing the young lady in his arms, bore her to a place of safety.

By this time others were at work, and many lives were saved, though several persons had been killed at the first shock.

The young lady whom Jack had rescued swooned when out of danger, and the young fellow was obliged to take her through the tunnel and into the station before he could return to his engine.

To clear away the rubbish was the work of some hours, and during this time Jack remained by his engine, the passengers having finished the remainder of the journey on foot.

No blame was attached to Jack for the accident, for he had not been signaled, but when, after taking his engine back to the round-house, he was sent for by Mr. Steele, the president of the road, he feared that there was trouble ahead.

The very first words of the president banished all his doubts and fears.

"Mr. Quick," said the gentleman, "I desire, on behalf of myself, the superintendent and directors, to say that no blame attaches to you on account of this melancholy affair. Further, I have to thank you for having rendered to me, personally, a favor, which, believe me, I shall never forget."

"In what manner, sir? I am unaware of having done you a favor—unless, perhaps, in repaying your kindness to me by doing my duty at such a time."

"You have saved my daughter Ada from death. It was she you rescued from the burning car."

Jack was amazed, for until now he had not had the slightest idea that the young girl was such an important person.

"I did not know that, sir. I only knew that she was in peril, and that I might save her. Believe me, sir, I would have done the same for the poorest girl in the city."

"I know it; and I know, too, that the knowledge of my child's position could not have hastened your steps any more than they were. You did this thing from a sense of duty alone, and that is what makes it so much more noble."

"I am pleased, sir, to meet with your approval in anything," replied Jack, modestly.

"And I am delighted to be able to repay faithfulness such as you have always shown. I shall be pleased to see you at my house to

dinner this evening, when you will receive my daughter's thanks, in person, for the service you have done her."

Jack accepted the invitation with becoming modesty, and when he told Matt of the affair, the latter remarked, with a grin:

"You're in luck, Jack; but it serves you right for being so good to me. Hope you'll marry her in the end. That's the way all good pieces come out."

CHAPTER II.

OLD MOSE GIVES JACK SOME STARTLING INFORMATION.

WHEN Jack went home that evening, not having to run his train until early the next morning, he found Old Mose in a condition which is usually described as being "full as a tick."

The old money-lender drank to excess occasionally, and upon such occasions his nature seemed entirely changed.

As a rule he was excessively reticent, saying little or nothing, but when under the influence of liquor he grew extremely communicative and confidential, and revealed matters of which he could never be induced to speak when sober.

"Hallo, Jack!" he said, when the boy entered. "Heard you was in luck. He! he!" giving utterance to a peculiar giggle, which was characteristic of him. "So you are. More so than you imagine. He! he! I could tell something if I chose."

"The old man's got 'em on again," muttered Jack to himself. "Drunk as a fool. Wonder what's on his mind now?"

"Sit down, Jack," giggled the old fellow in an imbecile manner. "Sit down and take suthin'. I've got a story to tell ye."

Jack allowed his companion to fill a glass for him, but instead of drinking the stuff it contained he quietly emptied it on the floor, unnoticed by the old sot, who, sipping his own liquor, continued:

"This thing, your saving that girl—bless you! it's all over Preston now—brings something to mind. Here's Simon Steele, the railroad president, and here's Jack Quick, the railroad engineer," indicating them by two of the fingers on his right hand.

"Now, see here," he continued, after taking another sip of liquor, while Jack trimmed the lamp, the better to see the old fellow. "That's right, Jack, we want a little more light on this matter. Now, just listen, and I'll tell you a funny story—he, he!—a mighty funny one!

"Here's Simon Steele, and here's Jack Quick. No relation, are they?—he! he! Suppose I should tell ye that one was the uncle to the other, and that handsome, dissipated Ned Steele was cousin to him?—he! he! funny, ain't it?"

Jack was considerably surprised, to be sure, for he had never known much about himself, and, for all he knew, might be of much better origin than he supposed.

He did not interrupt the old fellow, however, as to do that would throw him off the track.

"You wouldn't suppose it, eh?—he, he! I know more than some folks give me credit for. Seems funny that Jack Quick and handsome Ned Steele and his pretty sister Ada should be cousins, but I can tell you something funnier yet.

"There were three cousins once, all men, all bearing the name of Steele, all only children, and all orphans, and dependent on their own exertions, but all three having an eye to an old grandfather, who had outlived his three sons.

"There was old Roger Steele; that's my thumb. Then there was Reginald Steele; he's Number One, and the first finger stands for him. Then there was Daniel Steele; he's Number Two, and the forefinger stands for him; and lastly, there's Simon Steele, and he's Number Three, and we'll call him the little finger.

"There we have 'em, and now let's go back. Old Roger dies and leaves a will, his property being divided up among the three cousins, his grandchildren. He—he! it wasn't divided the usual way, though.

"The old fox got up a way of his own to divide it. First, everything was to go to Number One, that's Reginald Steele, and when he got through with it and died, Number Two, that's Dan Steele, he was to have it, and after him, Number Three, that's Simon, he came in for it.

"Providing they had children, the oldest son was to have a certain fixed amount when the father died, the remainder going to Number Two and Number Three, as it might be, the son of the first getting the most.

"They knew all about this, and so they all got married, and each had a son and daughter, except Reginald, who had just a son only."

"I wonder what's coming next?" thought Jack. "This isn't very interesting."

"Now comes the point," continued the old man, taking another drink. "Besides the money which was to be left, there was a hundred and fifty thousand dollars, of which no mention was made in the old man's papers except one, which told where the money was hid in the cellar of an old building, used as a chapel and then as a house."

"This money wasn't mentioned in the will, but Number One, that's Reginald, he finds the paper, and determines to get the money, and so does Number Two, unknown to him. He—he! I told Daniel all about it, having discovered the paper myself, but saying nothing about it."

"Number One goes to get the hidden money in the night, with a lantern and a pick, and I crouched down behind an old tomb to look at him."

"He finds Number Two there before him, and there's a fight; when, suddenly, in the darkness, Number Three appears."

"Number One is stabbed—I'll swear that Dan did it—the place is thrown into darkness, and hurryin' footsteps are heard."

"I didn't dare for my life to say nothin' about it, and that night, the old man, Roger Steele, died, and the will was opened and read."

"Number One and Number Two had disappeared, and nobody knew what had become of 'em for ten years, and Number Three steps in and takes all the property."

"Then suddenly, in the cellar of the old chapel, is found a skeleton with a knife sticking between his ribs. That's the dead body of Number One, killed by Number Two, as I'll swear. The money is still hid, and no one knows where it is."

"Here's Simon Steele, my little finger. He—he! there's one place empty, isn't there? That one place stands for the son of Reginald Steele, who was murdered."

"People don't know whether that skeleton was One or Two, because both have disappeared; but I do, and I know that Daniel Steele still lives and daren't turn up to claim his share on account of being afraid of a charge of murder."

"Now to go back again. Here's Ned Steele, the son of Number Three, a blank for the son of Number One, who is missing, and here again is Jack Quick, the son of Number Two."

"If he steps in he can take away a good share of Ned Steele's fortune, and if his father turns up, he can take all that Simon Steele, the railroad president, owns, but he daren't show up."

"There you have it, Jack," concluded the old man, who was fast becoming drowsy, his voice being now thick from his frequent potations. "There you have it. Now, who do you suppose is your father? He—he! I know, Jack. Old Mose knows, but he won't tell. Your father is Dan Steele, who killed his cousin, but nowadays he goes by the name of Dan Deacon, or sometimes Deacon Dan, on account of his pious ways."

"He, he! that's a good 'un, Jack; he, he! bless my soul, if it ain't. A fine deacon he'd make, with his rum and his cards and his wild ways. Deacon Dan! he, he! and he's your father, Jack. Ain't you proud to have him for a dad?"

"He, he! Ned Steele's father is a thief, and yours is a murderer, and Number One's son can't be found, and a fortun' goin' begging and another one hidden away somewhere's, so's nobody can find it. Told ye I'd tell ye a funny story. Take another drink, Jack."

"Dan Deacon, my father!" cried Jack, in horror. "That black-leg, gambler, for all that men know, something worse! He my father? Oh, it is too much."

"What's that?" stammered the old man, thickly. "Wazzer mazz-zer, Jack?"

"For Heaven's sake, Mose, tell me more. Does Dan Deacon know that I am his son?"

"Guess not. What ye're talking about?"

"Does Dan Deacon, gambler, and—if the stories you have told about him are true—forgery and counterfeiter, does he know, I say, that I am his son?"

But the old sot was too drunk now to make any reply, and sat with his head and arms on the table, the bottle empty, the lamp nearly out, and the room cold and dreary.

Leaving him where he was, Jack went up to bed, having locked the

doors, taking the lamp with him, but was unable to get any sleep for hours, owing to the excitement into which his brain had been thrown by the revelations made to him by Old Mose.

He fell asleep at last, but did not get more than three hours' rest, having to awaken early so as to take his train out as usual.

He awoke in time, as he always did, and dressing himself, went below, where Old Mose was still lying in a drunken sleep, from which there was no hope of arousing him.

"I must learn more," thought Jack, "but I haven't time to speak to him now. Well, if I am the son of such a wretch as Dan Deacon, I won't acknowledge him, and you may be sure that I shan't brag over it. Perhaps if I keep my mouth shut, nobody will know it, and I wouldn't have this thing get out for a thousand dollars."

CHAPTER III.

OLD MOSE REVEALS MORE SECRETS AND IS DISCOVERED AT IT.

JACK met Dan Deacon that day when he came back from making his trip, but, although the man knew him, being an occasional visitor at the house of Old Mose, he did not pay the boy any more attention than he generally did, merely giving him a surly nod as he passed.

"Perhaps he doesn't know," thought Jack. "Well, I don't intend to enlighten him. Such a man as he for my father! I declare, it's disgusting. Well, it's not my fault, but I wish it wasn't so, that's all."

When he reached home he found Mose there, eating his supper, which had been brought in from a neighboring restaurant, kept by a man named Dirty Jake, not from any personal uncleanness of his, but because, somehow, he had always borne that name.

Matt had formerly lived with this man, but that was nearly two years before, and the man had changed his habits considerably since then, and was not regarded as being so rough a customer, although Matt had long since left him.

Jake was a frequent visitor at the old money-lender's, as were a half-dozen others, with whom Jack would have nothing to do, on account of the suspicious characters they bore, of which I will speak further later on in my story.

"How are you, pop?" asked Jack, the old man merely nodding his head and going on with his meal.

"I want to know more of what you told me last night."

"Didn't tell you nothin'."

"Why, yes, you did. About Simon Steele, you know, and Dan Deacon, and some missing——"

"Never told you nothing. Don't know Simon Steele, only by name. Dan Deacon's a friend of mine."

"But is he my——"

"He ain't nobody, only Dan Deacon, that's all. He's a good feller."

All Jack's endeavors to draw the old fellow out were unavailing, for he would only answer in monosyllables or grunts, and denied having said anything at all to Jack the previous night.

"It's no use," thought the lad. "I shall have to get him drunk before I can learn any more."

But the old fellow would drink nothing, and it was three weeks before Jack could find out anything, and even then the old man would say nothing of the subject which so deeply interested the boy.

Meanwhile Jack was a frequent visitor to the house of Mr. Steele, who treated him with the utmost consideration and respect, but never by word, sign or look indicated that he was aware of the secret of Jack's birth and parentage.

Jack often met Ned Steele, the brother of Ada, and was always treated pleasantly by him, having known him slightly previous to the rescue of Ada from the burning coach.

Ned was a year older than Jack, was handsome and agreeable, though somewhat weak and inclined to be fast, being kept on in that course by a friend of his named Tracy Tufts, a young fellow of about his own age, and decidedly dissolute in his habits.

He was, moreover, thoroughly unprincipled, and exerted some mysterious influence over Ned, of which more anon, and of which Simon Steele knew nothing on account of his busy life, although it was patent to everyone else.

Tracy Tufts was a sort of ward of Dan Deacon's, who, despite his questionable name, resided in one of the most fashionable quarters of Preston, owned a fine house, horses and carriages, and was supposed to be enormously wealthy.

Tracy lived with Dan Deacon, and was said to be the heir of a large

estate somewhere, which Dan held in trust for him, supplying him freely with money, alleged to be the interest upon his fortune.

The young fellow was handsome, but there was a dissolute look in his face, even more so than in Ned's, and an evil expression which made people dislike him, so that he was universally distrusted, although he managed to move in good society.

Ned Steele was weak and not naturally bad, but Tracy Tuffits was evil by nature and inclination, and seemed bound to lead his chum into ways that would destroy all the good in him and make him thoroughly bad.

This man seemed to have taken a fancy to Ada Steele, and Jack often met him there and was obliged to treat him with respect, although he thoroughly despised him.

"If it wasn't for him, Ned Steele would be a decent fellow," Jack often thought to himself. "I wonder what hold he has on him? I rather like Ned, but this man is bad from head to foot. I don't wonder at it, living with Dan Deacon, as he does."

Since he began visiting at the Steeles Jack saw more of Deacon, who came there now and then of an evening, and seemed to be urging his ward's suit, though Mr. Steele was usually too busy to see him, and Ada's mother appeared to distrust him, and pay more marked attention to Jack.

It was about a month after Jack's adventure in the tunnel, when one night, as he entered his own house he saw old Mose seated at the table in an unmistakable state of booze.

"Good-evenin', Jack," he muttered. "Sit down and take suthin'. My friends have been here. Dirty Jake, the restaurant man; Queer Sam, the nigger minstrel; Nobby George, the blower at the museum down on Pine street; Bully Bill, what keeps the gymnasium, and Brassy Ben, the locksmith."

"A nice crowd, surely," thought Jack. "I'll bet every one of 'em is crooked, and I know the police have shadowed 'em more than once. Wonder if my honored father, Mr. Dan, Deacon, so-called, was with 'em?"

"Dan Deacon was here, too, Jack," the old fellow went on. "He's a nice fellow, he is. We've got a new thing on hand, and the gang is goin' to make lots o' money out of it."

"The gang?" thought Jack. "What can the old wretch mean?"

"Ye see, nobody suspects us. I'm only a money-lender, and Jake, he keeps a restaurant, and George, he's a showman, and we've all got suthin' to show folks that we're honest. But we ain't, Jack. He-he! We make a livin' out o' honest folks, and a good one, too."

"You old villain," mused the boy; "I have often thought, from what you have told me, that your associates were none too good, but I never supposed you yourself were crooked."

"It's a nice business, Jack, counterfeitin' is, and we make lots of money at it. Dan Deacon, he knows the ropes, but he never shows his hand, he is always so respectable, and lives in a big house, you know."

"He's a keen one, though, Dan is, and can manage the boys. You'd never suppose he was the leader of a gang o' ruffians what attacks railroad trains, would you? His gang never touches your train, though. They know better."

"He does know that I am his son, then," thought Jack, "and that is why I am not molested. These train robberies have been very mysterious, and the perpetrators always escape detection. I will stop them now, though, or I am much mistaken."

"The boys will be around again to-night, I reckon," Mose resumed, after a pause. "They want to arrange about gettin' a new den to work in. I don't believe I'll let 'em take my cellar, but I know of a good one. He-he! that'll be a funny place to work in, Jack, but I can get it."

"That young fellow that lives with Dan Deacon, he-he! You wouldn't think he was with the gang, would you? That's where he gets his money, but he don't know about it. Thinks it's the interest on his estate."

"He-he! that's a good one! He's a regular stool-pigeon, he is! Got some hold on Ned Steele, too. Guess I could tell what it is if I want to, but Dan pays me to keep quiet. Wants to keep a hold on him, so's to use his influence towards getting Steele's daughter for the young fellow's wife."

Had Jack not been so intensely interested in what the old rascal was saying, he might have heard a rustling at the little window behind him.

He might have seen, also, a face pressed close against the pane; seen the expression of deadly hate in the dark eyes which peered into the room.

The face was that of Dirty Jake, the neighbor of Old Mose, and the man heard every word that was uttered.

"The old man has got one of his confidential fits again," he hissed. "We'll have to look out for him, or he may give the whole business away. The young fellow knows all now, and he's got to die!"

Then he hurried away, but Mose was pretty drunk by this time and would say no more, although the mischief had already been done.

Jack was preparing to go up to his room when there came a sudden rap at the door.

He opened it, and was immediately seized by Dan Deacon, Dirty Jake and Bully Bill.

Behind them he could just make out the forms of Tracy Tuffits and—yes, there was no mistaking him, the ringleader, Ned Steele, his own cousin.

Before he could cry out he was gagged and bound, and then Dan Deacon hissed in his ear:

"You young imp, you know too much! If the old man wasn't useful to us we'd kill him, too. Come, boys, away with him, and drop him down the tunnel!"

CHAPTER IV.

WITHIN AN INCH OF DEATH.

JACK could not understand what Dan meant, but he knew that some dreadful fate was in store for him, knowing the man to be cruel and vindictive.

He could see nothing of the two young men now, and presently also Dan disappeared, leaving him to the care of three of the villains, who hurried him along through the darkest streets until they came to a dilapidated old house, where he was carried in and locked up.

An hour later he was taken out and led by his captors up a hill and along a street, under which was the tunnel of the Northern and Eastern Railway.

At intervals there were holes let into the top of the tunnel for the purpose of admitting light and air, these being guarded by railings eight or ten feet away.

There were plots of grass in the middle of the street, the top of the tunnel being covered with earth and sodded, and at intervals of fifteen or twenty feet was an open hole, built into the arch.

The whole space in the center of the street was inclosed in iron railings, except at the crossings, so that there was no danger of any one falling down the air-holes.

There were houses on both sides with a narrow roadway between them, and the railings for the accommodation of travel, but at this time the street was dark and deserted.

All around lay the snow, thick and white, the chill wind sweeping along the top of the hill and penetrating to the very marrow.

The moon was now obscured, but if this wind should continue the clouds would be all blown away before long.

The party made their way to a point some distance from the city end of the tunnel, and then, lifting Jack over the railing, sprang over themselves.

What were they going to do with him?

Drop him down one of the air-holes?

The fall would kill him, or, if it did not, there would be a train along before midnight, which would destroy what life the fall had left.

That such was not their intention, however, was soon apparent.

One of the men had a strong, fine rope, and this was knotted under Jack's arms, and made secure.

"We're going to lower you down this hole," said one of the men, with a devilish grin upon his ugly face, "and let you wait till the train comes."

"You'll hang there first-rate," laughed a second, "until you get struck by the engine, and then you'll swing like a top, providin' there's anything left of ye."

What could the ruffians mean?

"Hurry up, George; the train is due pretty soon, and the moon's comin' out."

"All right. We'll come here after and cut the rope."

"And when he's found to-morrow, all mashed and dead, folks'll say that he was foolish to try and climb down inter the tunnel!"

"Serve him right for findin' out about us. Now we kin work without being hindered."

"Hurry up; don't ye hear the train gettin' ready to start?"

Jack was then lowered down the air-hole into the tunnel until his feet were within about six feet of the ground, when the rope was secured to an iron bar placed across the hole.

His arms were bound behind him, his feet fastened firmly together, and a gag in his mouth prevented him from uttering a sound.

There he was, suspended above the track between the rails, at a height which would cause the engine to strike him when it came along.

To be struck by the smokestack or boiler-head of an engine going at full speed!

It would be his death!

Was there no hope of escape from this fearful fate?

It seemed not.

He was entirely powerless to move or cry out, and the chances of being seen were small.

The engineer would not think of looking out while passing through the tunnel, and so near the city.

If he did he would probably run his eyes along the ground for possible obstructions, and never think of looking up.

He would not see the boy suspended above the track, or if he did, might not be able to stop in time to prevent an accident.

The train must start now, he knew, in a very few moments, and who could help him in that time?

Ah! what is that?

His form is suddenly bathed in a flood of bright light.

The glare from the approaching engine?

No, but the moon, now free from the clouds, has sent a flood of light down the air-hole, and his form is thrown into bold relief.

What is that he now hears?

The rumble of the outgoing train, the rattle of the wheels, the shriek of the engine, the ringing of the bell, the puff of the escaping steam.

The train has started, and will be here in a few minutes!

The poor fellow suddenly sees a light glittering upon the iron rails in front of him.

It leaps and sparkles, and now grows broad and distinct and extends far ahead of him.

It is the glare of the head-light upon the coming engine.

It broadens and extends now far in front until it is lost in the darkness of the tunnel.

He sees every object within its borders as distinctly as though it were day.

Is there no one within the tunnel that will see and help him?

Is there no one to give warning to the engineer and prevent a catastrophe?

No; the place is entirely deserted.

Will not the engineer himself see that object suspended above the track and come to a halt?

It appears not.

On comes the train with unabated speed, and now the tunnel is filled with smoke, which blinds and chokes him.

Oh! for an instant's power of speech, that he might wake the echoes and sound a dreadful warning.

Oh! to be free, for one moment even, that he might draw himself out of danger.

But there he hangs, his back to the engine, the glare of which now floods him with light, while from above the white rays of the moon fall upon him, and gives his white face the appearance of death itself.

It is a frightful moment, for he now expects death, and the thought is maddening.

To die in such a manner, to be cut off in the full prime of young manhood! Oh, it is indeed terrible.

To be parted from all that is near and dear to him, when life is so full of promise; when the first emotions of a tender love have been awakened in his breast; when, for the first time, he experiences a longing to be something better and nobler than he has yet been; at such a time the desire to live surpasses all others, and sweeps over his soul like a whirlwind.

"My God!" he cries within his inmost heart, "is there no help!"

Yes, there is help, but there is but little time to spare, and it may come too late.

Over the snow-covered ground above him two figures are hastening along, darting a hurried glance at each air-hole as they pass swiftly by in the hope of discovering his presence.

Haste, brave lads, or your labor of love will be in vain!

Yes, there is help at hand, and God grant that it may be of avail in this perilous moment.

Suddenly the two figures pause, and one cries frantically:

"Here he is! Here is the rope!"

"Quick, then, for the love of Heaven! The train is just below!"

With willing hands, nerved for the trial, the two lads seize the rope upon which Jack hangs suspended.

At that very moment the engine is within six feet of the imperiled boy, and in another minute their efforts will have been in vain!

When that rope is drawn up will they behold the mangled form of poor Jack, crushed and dead, or will they have rescued him?

Who can tell?

Everything depends upon the work of a moment.

And as Jack hangs there, expecting death in another instant, he feels himself gliding rapidly upward, and, overcome by a storm of emotions, becomes unconscious.

Has he been saved?

Not yet, for at that moment the engine leaps the narrow space which yet intervenes, and his form has not yet cleared the point of safety.

Heaven help him now, for there is but the breadth of a hair between that young life and eternity!

CHAPTER V.

NED'S STRATAGEM—THE RESCUE.

"SOMETHING must be done to save that poor fellow from a horrible death!"

So thought Ned Steele, for he dared not to speak the words, being in company with Tracy.

"His case will be settled now!" exclaimed Tracy, as the two walked away, arm-in-arm. "They will kill him sure, and we won't be bothered with him any more."

Ned made no reply, for he knew that if he expressed any sympathy for Jack he would not be able to help him, for then Tracy would remain with him as long as there was any chance of Jack's being alive.

"What'll they do with him?"

"Hang him down the tunnel and let the midnight express dash him to pieces."

"Horrible!"

"Is it? Well, don't you say that to any one else, or you'll get into trouble. You would like to save his life, I suppose?"

"Oh, no; it is nothing to me," answered Ned, carelessly; "but they might give him an easier death, if they are bound to kill him."

"See here, Ned, I have told you this in order to show you how we can punish our enemies. I would serve you the same way if you went back on me."

"I'm not afraid of death!"

"No; but you are of ruin and disgrace. Were I to expose a certain little matter which I know of you would be forever disgraced."

"For Heaven's sake, man, don't talk so loud!"

"Ah! I have touched you, have I? You wouldn't want it known that you forged a note to a large amount, using the name of a New York firm with whom you are acquainted? You wouldn't want this matter to come out?"

"No, no, not for worlds."

"I thought not. I've got that note, for I was bitten by it; but it isn't the loss of the money I mind, for I consider that I have been more than paid by the hold I have on you."

Ned groaned.

"You haven't been urging my claims to your sister's hand very strongly of late, Ned."

"What can I do? She hates you, distrusts you, and loves Jack."

"You can help me, and you've got to do it. You write a beautiful hand, Ned, but there's one strange thing about it. You can make it look just like somebody else's."

"For the love of—"

"Oh, you don't like me to say anything about that, eh? Now suppose a letter from Jack Quick to some young woman, anybody almost,

should be found? Let it be tender and loving and all that. Your sister would throw Jack over, would she not?"

"No, she would seek an explanation, and it would all come out."

"But suppose the young woman should tell Ada that Jack was false? I know a girl that will do it. There is Grace Grant, for instance."

"No—no, she shall not. She has brought ruin enough on me already. Besides, there will be no need, for Jack will be dead in the morning."

Tracy had purposely introduced this matter, in order to sound Ned, and he was now convinced that he had no intention of trying to save Jack.

That was where Ned, weak though he was, misled him, for the young man was thinking with all his might of some plan by which he could save the young engineer.

They presently arrived at the elegant mansion where Ned lived, and entering, they passed at once to the drawing-room.

Ada came forward, and as Ned kissed her he held her a moment in his arms, and hurriedly whispered:

"Get Tracy out of the house. Jack is in danger of his life, and I want to save him."

Ada turned pale and uttered a slight scream, but quickly recovering herself, she cried:

"You horrid boy, you've scratched me! That diamond of yours is as sharp as a needle."

"Then I'll take it off," and Ned put the ring which had done the alleged injury into his pocket, Ada wrapping a lace shawl quickly around her throat.

"Good-evening, Mr. Tuffts," she said pleasantly. "I am so glad you came. We are going to the opera and a party afterwards, and would be pleased to have you with us."

"Is it not rather late?"

"Oh, no; we don't care to see anything but the last act. That is too good to miss. You'll go, of course."

"Is Ned going?"

"Can't you get along without Ned for one evening?" she pouted. "I never see you at all unless Ned is about, and he is so clumsy. Oh, we can take him along, I suppose, but it won't be half so nice."

"Oh, if you two want to spoon I'll stay at home," replied Ned.

"That will be nice. I'll go and get my things," and Ada ran off lightly, not caring to leave the two young men alone too long.

"That's all right, Ned," said Tracy. "I shall get on first-rate, but let me advise you not to leave the house until I come back! You're all right now, but you might change your mind regarding Jack Quick before I get back."

"Oh, bother Jack Quick!"

Tracy laughed, thinking he had frightened Ned out of any lingering desire he might have to save Jack, and said:

"This house will be watched, and if you leave it I shall know it. If you do not desire exposure you will remain in until I get back."

"That's your game, is it?" thought Ned. "All right, my boy. Forewarned is forearmed!"

"Oh, I don't care to go out," he said quietly. "It's too cold."

At that moment Ada appeared, and while Ned arranged her cloak about her shoulders he continued to whisper so as not to be overheard by Tracy:

"Keep him out as long as you can, sis."

Then the two went out together, and at the end of half an hour Ned slipped out at the rear entrance, having first taken the precaution to put on a dress, shawl and bonnet belonging to one of the servants.

He saw no one whom he suspected of being a spy, but for all that he was not sure but that the man standing on the street corner might not be one, and he acted so as not to arouse the least suspicion.

"Now to find Matt," he murmured, for he knew the boy, and knew too that he would do anything for Jack.

He found the lad at home, and, calling him outside where it was dark, whispered cautiously:

"I am Ned Steele. I was watched and had to put on these togs. Get me out of them and come with me. Jack Quick is in danger of his life, and there's no time to lose."

"Jack in danger? Follow me."

They passed around to the rear of the house to where there was a shed, and here Ned took off his woman's garments and slipped a fur

cap on his head, having had it concealed in his coat-pocket until now.

"Now we're off," cried Matt, throwing the discarded raiment into a corner. "Where is it?"

"On top of the railroad tunnel," and as they hurried on he explained the matter more fully to Matt.

When they reached the tunnel they were obliged to proceed with caution, not knowing but what the villains might still be about.

"I've got a pistol," whispered Ned. "Ah, there comes the moon, and look, do you see those fellows hurrying away?"

"Yes, and by George! the train has started."

They hurriedly leaped over the railings and ran along, peering anxiously into every air-hole for a sign of the rope.

Looking behind, they could see the black smoke from the engine escaping from the air-holes, and hear the rumble of the train beneath them.

"Hurry, Matt, for God's sake!"

They fairly flew over the ground, leaping the railings at the crossings, when, presently, Matt stopped and cried excitedly:

"Here it is!"

They had found the rope and the iron bar which held it up.

Ned glanced down into the hole, and throwing himself flat on his stomach, uttered a cry of dismay.

"It is almost here! Pull, Matt, pull with all your might!"

Both boys laid hold upon the rope and drew it up several feet.

"Pull again, Matt; once more, now, or we will be too late!"

Ay, they would indeed be too late, for now the engine was within a foot of Jack as he swung there.

"Pull, Matt, pull!"

Both boys sprang to their feet, and seizing the rope, ran with it over the snow as fast as their legs could carry them.

"Stop!" cried Ned suddenly. "Do you see that smoke? The engine has passed the place. He is either saved or dead now. Let us go back and see."

Holding firmly to the rope that it might not slip, they walked back to the hole and looked down.

"Jack!" called Ned.

There was no answer.

"The poor fellow is dead!" gasped Matt.

"No—no, he may have fainted. Draw up the rope."

They drew up the remainder, and in a few moments Jack's unconscious form was laid upon the snow at their feet.

Ned put his ear to the boy's heart, and Matt ran his hand hastily over his form from head to foot.

"He lives—he breathes! Thank God!"

"He is unhurt. We were in time after all."

Yes, they had saved him, indeed, but none of them knew how dangerously near to death the poor boy had been.

"He is safe—he revives—he opens his eyes. He lives, thank Heaven, and is unhurt! Come, let us get away from here as quickly as possible."

CHAPTER VI.

THE ROBBERS CHANGE THEIR PLANS.

It began to snow again about an hour afterwards, and when Jack took his train out in the morning there was every prospect of a blockade unless the snow ceased falling, which, however, it showed no signs of doing.

When Jack had been rescued, he had been taken to Matt's house, which he desired to make his home for the present, in order not to arouse the suspicions of Dan Deacon and his pals.

Ned hurried back home, and had been in about ten minutes, snugly ensconced by the fire-place, in smoking-jacket and slippers, when Ada and her escort returned.

Tracy had evidently seen his spies, for when Ada had retired, he said:

"All right, Ned; you've acted squarely to-night, and I've had a very pleasant evening. You've evidently been acting upon my suggestions, for your sister was never more charming."

"She must have found it hard work to treat such a brute as you civilly," thought Ned.

"With Jack Quick out of the way, I need fear no opposition," continued the unprincipled young scoundrel. "If you continue to work

my case right all will be well, and on the day that I make Ada my wife that little paper I possess is yours."

"Never fear it will be mine yet," was the reply, but there was a double meaning to the words which Tracy Tufts did not catch.

When he had finally departed, Ned ran up-stairs, and knocking at Ada's door, said hurriedly:

"Can I come in, sis?"

The door was instantly thrown open, and Ada, who had been waiting for him, threw her arms around his neck and cried:

"Is Jack safe?"

"Yes, though it was a tight squeeze. I was never so frightened in all my life. Ada, dear, I rely upon you to save me from disgrace. You don't love Tracy Tufts?"

"Love him! I hate the very sight of him. If it hadn't been that I knew I was helping Jack, I couldn't have treated him decently to-night. He is a disgusting *roue* and nothing less. I wouldn't be his wife if there wasn't another man in the whole world."

"And must I sacrifice her to this villain?" thought Ned. "No, no, I cannot; but then, the disgrace, the exposure which would follow! I could never hold up my head again. Oh, that I had the strength to defy this scoundrel!"

"You look troubled, Ned," said Ada, gently. "Tell me what vexes you?"

"No, no, I cannot. Ada, child, don't marry this man, whatever happens. Run away. Marry Jack, do anything, but don't marry Tracy Tufts. It may ruin me if you don't, but never mind that. I will not see you sacrificed to such a villain."

Then he suddenly stopped, and told his sister about the rescue, saying in conclusion:

"We're going to keep dark about the fellows who did this thing, until we can get the whole gang. Somebody'll be surprised to-morrow when Jack Quick appears at his post."

Then he would say no more, fearing to tell the whole truth, and yet longing to do so; but as yet he was not strong enough to face the disgrace that Tufts threatened to bring upon him, and he therefore was forced to be silent, although he had half resolved not to see Ada sacrificed.

When Jack went out that morning the superintendent said to him:

"Make the run if you can, Jack, but if, when you get to Chesterton, you find that it will be impossible to return, telegraph."

"All right, sir. The flats at Harrow will be the greatest place to fear, however. The wind has a terrible sweep there, the scattered trees offering but little resistance, and that's where the deepest drifts are found."

"Let me know how they are when you get there, and if necessary I will send a snow-plow out to clear the track for you on your return. I want to have the express make the round trip, if no other train does."

"I'll do all I can, sir."

"No one can do more than that, my boy. Good-day, Jack, and an easy trip to you."

Harrow was a town about midway on the line, and was surrounded by flats, sparsely grown with trees, the worst place being about ten miles out from the Preston end of the tract, where, owing to the lack of sheltering hills, the wind had full sweep, the snow drifts having been known to be fully fifteen feet on a level, occurring at short intervals for a space of two miles.

It was snowing heavily when Jack set out, and before he had gone twenty miles he began to experience considerable difficulty in getting along, owing to the cutting wind.

At Jackson, twenty-five miles out, a party of twenty men got in and divided themselves into groups, scattered through the train.

One of these groups, consisting of six men, claims our attention, for they are none others than Dan Deacon's pals.

"Did you see who was running the engine?" asked George.

"Yes, it was Jack Quick."

"How the dence did he escape?" came from a third.

"The rope was broken when we hauled it up. Maybe he wasn't killed, but got away with a few bruises."

"You can bet your life he was rescued by someone. You must make sure of him this time, though."

"You bet we will."

"The boys all understand the game?"

"Yes; but we'd better go through the cars and speak to two or

three apiece and post 'em about this racket. Tell 'em to be particular to plug the engineer first of all."

"There's a lot of swag aboard. There's half a dozen rich duffers in this car alone that must have their pockets well lined."

"What gets me is that he didn't give the snap away," said Jake. "He knew it of course, 'cause the old man told him."

"We'll see what happens when we get to Wilders, and if no fly-cops bother us, we'll take up our case on the Harrow flats instead of the other place."

"All hunk, but whoever sees anything wrong fust, must give it away so's we kin hold our own."

It was the intention of these men to rob the train, and, being scattered through it, as they were, they had every hope of succeeding."

Whether they did or not will be seen as we proceed.

When Wilders was reached the snow was falling in blinding sheets, not flakes, the wind driving it into the cab, across the platforms, under the wheels, everywhere in fact, with the most untiring energy, so that the very air was one mass of white particles.

It was into everything, this snow, and the wind was so cold and piercing, that it was like facing a storm of needles to turn one's head to it.

All the air was white, the glittering masses piled thick and high over hill and dale, on rock and tree, on road and stream, until it seemed as if the whole earth must be buried beneath the white mantle.

It lay in drifts across the tracks, and it was with difficulty that the powerful engine could force a way through it, at last.

"I am afraid we won't even make the flats at this rate, Matt."

"So it seems; it's the wust snow storm that ever I see."

Thicker and thicker became the drifts, and more difficult of breaking through, the wind fairly howling now and piling the shining masses higher and higher upon the track.

When the engine reached the edge of the Harrow flats, nothing but a clear expanse of snow could be seen, the track being utterly obliterated.

"I'm bound to go through if it's a possible thing," said Jack, and increasing his speed he dashed ahead, although the task he had set out to accomplish seemed well nigh impossible.

CHAPTER VII.

SNOW BOUND—THE ATTACK AND REPULSE.

THE gallant engine struggled bravely, but Jack had not fully estimated the difficulties ahead of him, and before he had gone half a mile he found himself stuck fast in a drift.

The telegraph wires had all been broken down, in some instances dragging the poles with them, and thus communication with Preston or points beyond was utterly cut off.

The snow still fell thickly, and the wind at this point having full sweep, the drifts were something frightful.

The cold, too, was intense, and it was the utmost rashness to attempt to face it unless one were most warmly clad, the wind seeming to penetrate to the very marrow.

The snow reached to the footboard of the engine, being piled up in front almost as high as the head-light, while along the line of cars it was already higher than the platforms.

Deeper and deeper it grew, the wind now having something to sweep the white masses against, and scarcely three minutes had elapsed after the stopping of the engine before the snow on the windward side was up to the very car windows.

"We're stuck fast," said Jack, putting his lever amidships. "This is worse than I anticipated."

"We're fixed, that's certain."

"By George! What's that?" cried Jack, suddenly, as he heard a confused noise behind him.

The truth of the matter was, that the outlaws, deeming this as good a place as any to begin operations, had suddenly showed their hands.

It happened, however, that the passengers in the car occupied by George, Jake and the rest, were a determined lot, and when the outlaws arose and demanded a general surrender, they made a determined stand and began to make things particularly hot for the rogues.

The confusion attracted the attention of the passengers in the cars

directly in the front and rear, and the outlaws here, taking their cue from the others, began to carry out their plans.

"There's trouble back there," shouted Jack, and leaping across the tender he sprang upon the baggage car, sped hurriedly along the top and reached the first passenger coach.

By this time several passengers, sitting nearest the door, had rushed out upon the platform, and finding their way in that direction barred by the snow, had scrambled upon the roof.

"There's robbery going on inside," screamed one. "Where's the engineer?"

"Here I am!" cried Jack.

"And I ain't far behind!" added Matt, dashing up. "What's the trouble?"

Crash!

Crack!

One of the car windows was broken in, and the form of a man was seen flying out into the snow.

It was one of the outlaws who had been thus summarily ejected.

The ruffian had his revolver in his hand, and as he was pitched out he suddenly let drive.

"If there's any shooting going on, I'm going to take a hand!" cried Jack.

The adventure of the night before had taught him a lesson, and he was now provided with a revolver, which he knew well how to use.

"Follow me!" he cried, leaping down upon the platform, and throwing open the door.

The outlaws in this car had retreated to the next, and when Jack appeared and shouted to the passengers to make a bold stand, they all rushed to the other car, where, reinforcing their fellows, they obliged the outlaws to beat a retreat.

Shots were freely interchanged, and the cars were soon filled with smoke.

One of the stoves were overturned in the rush, and there was danger of a conflagration, the woodwork beginning to blaze up in a second.

The outlaws had by this time all congregated in the last car, and, being hard pressed, Jack and Matt leading the passengers, thus retreated to the roof.

"Upon them!" yelled Jack as he broke in the door, which they had blocked against him, and in a moment he blazed away at Dirty Jake, this fellow being the first that he recognized.

George and Bill rallied the outlaws, and now began a fierce struggle upon the car roofs, the passengers, or rather such of them as had not been paralyzed with fear, being led by Jack and Matt.

Many of them had pistols, and knew how to use them, and the firing was almost incessant.

It was extremely difficult to keep a footing upon the snow-covered, slippery roofs of the coaches, and many bad falls were received as the excited combatants rushed to and fro.

Now and then there would be a hand-to-hand struggle, and one of the outlaws, or perhaps a passenger, would be hurled off into the deep drifts, or losing his footing, would roll off, dragging his opponent with him.

During the whole of this contest the snow was whirling and driving, drifting and sweeping about the combatants, blinding and chilling them, now rushing upon them with such fury that they were obliged to pause in the fierce struggle, and then momentarily ceasing, as though to give them an opportunity to resume the fight.

Fortunately the fire in the car where the stove had been upset was now extinguished, a few cool hands having dashed masses of snow upon the flames, putting them out, but endangering themselves on account of the steam which arose from the contact of the snow with the glowing coals.

Jack had now got all his men together upon one car, and the timid ones, seeing that the fight was likely to go against the outlaws, now rushed to the aid of their friends, rendering them valuable assistance in point of numbers, if in nothing else.

The robbers were outnumbered, and seeing that now, owing to the determined air of the young engineer, they could not carry their point, they retreated to the rear car, and fastening themselves in stood upon the defensive.

"Now, my men," said Jack, "we must try and dig ourselves out. There are half a dozen snow shovels in the baggage car, and with these we can do something."

"What yer goin' to do wid all these men?" asked Matt.

"I don't know, unless they make snow shovels of themselves, and crowd back the snow in front of the engine."

Those who heard him laughed, but a dozen of them immediately began putting this suggestion into practice, and when the shovelers had cleared away a place for them to get to work in, they began crowding the snow back, and soon cleared a considerable space.

As fast as one gang became exhausted, another would take its place, the work being extremely fatiguing, and in that way a space to the extent of twenty-five feet in front of the engine was cleared away in half an hour.

Uncoupling the last car, and leaving it behind, Jack went ahead, rushing at the drift with a force that carried him fully twenty feet into it, but here he again came to a halt.

"If we can get beyond this place," said he, "the rest won't be so bad, for the wind has left the track perfectly bare in some places. Wonder how those fellows back there like being left alone?"

They did not like it, to tell the truth, but they were obliged to submit under the circumstances, and remained in the warm car talking over their defeat, while the passengers were busily engaged in digging their way out of the drifts.

CHAPTER VIII.

JACK AGAIN IN THE TOILS.

At the end of three hours Jack had passed the worst of the flats, but with the train behind him it would take until night to reach Harrow, and time was precious.

Uncoupling his engine, therefore, he resolved to run up to the town, get two more engines, and then return for the train.

The passengers were now able to take care of themselves, as the outlaws would not again molest them, and there was fuel enough to keep the fires going for several hours.

Away steamed the engine with Jack and Matt aboard, and although the wind howled and raged about them, dashing the blinding snow and sleet into their faces, they kept on bravely, and though they sometimes had to charge at a drift two or three times before they could subdue it, there were other places where they could run with great speed, and in this manner they cleared the seven or eight miles which lay between them and Harrow in about ninety minutes.

Once arrived at the town they procured two powerful engines and a snow-plow, the yard at Harrow being fortunately supplied with what they required, and set out for the return.

At the end of a couple of hours they had reached the train, and then puffing and snorting they started off again, dragging the train behind them.

The outlaws were left two miles behind, for Jack did not care to run back through those terrible drifts to get the car which they had not yet abandoned, on account of the fury of the storm.

It was three o'clock by the time Harrow was reached, and no trains had passed through from Chesterton way, the engineers fearing to attempt the passage of the flats.

Two or three trains had stopped there, and it was owing to this fact that Jack had been able to get so many extra engines, as under ordinary circumstances he could not have obtained more than one.

There was no way of communicating with Preston, and Jack, finding that by this time the rest of the road was pretty well blocked, determined to go no further that night, but to wait until the track could be cleared.

Discharging his passengers and housing his engine, he and Matt went up into the city and made their way to a quiet hotel which they knew of, Jack leaving directions with the station-master to send for him in case any word was received from Mr. Matthews.

There was clearly nothing more to be done for the road ahead was now impassable, such a severe storm not having been known for years, or within the memory of the oldest inhabitant, that old fossil who delights in telling the most extraordinary stories concerning his boyhood, which nobody believes, but which he persists in telling for all that.

Had there been any chance of getting through to Chesterton, Jack would have made the attempt, but he well knew that to do so would be exposing the lives of his passengers, and he took the very best course open to him.

By five o'clock it was quite dark and having eaten a hearty dinner, Jack set out to learn the news, see the sights and otherwise enjoy

himself, promising to return in the course of an hour or two, or send for Matt if necessary.

Had our hero noticed particularly a man standing near the door of the little hotel when he and Matt entered he might not have gone out alone, but as he had not, he was perfectly unconscious of impending danger, and took no more than his usual precaution.

That man was Dan Deacon and he had been in Harrow ever since the morning, having taken the midnight train out from Preston the night before.

"Confound them, they have let him escape," he hissed, as the two boys went in. "I wonder how their plans succeeded this morning?"

In the course of an hour or so he had heard all about the attack and repulse of the outlaws, the news spreading through the town like wild-fire, and being the universal topic of conversation in the hotels, bar-rooms, at the railroad station and in all the public places of the town.

"That young rascal must be got rid of," muttered Deacon to himself. "I'll go and see my old friend Pipes and consult him upon the affair."

What the consultation resulted in will be seen later on.

Jack had gone about five hundred yards from the hotel, his coat buttoned up to his chin, his fur cap drawn down to his eyes, and his gloved hands thrust deep into his pockets, when he was suddenly accosted by a ragged, dirty-faced urchin, who said, excitedly:

"Hallo! Are you Jack Quick?"

"What do you want of him?"

"The man at the station sent me up to der Continental Hotel to find yer, and tell yer to come right down dere. I've got a telegraph for yer."

"Have you been to the hotel?"

"No, not yet; I thought I knowed yer and so I hollered. Come in here to dis alley, and I'll get the message out'n me pocket. It's cold stan'n here."

Suspecting nothing, Jack entered the alley when he was suddenly set upon by two men muffled up to the eyes, and before he could resist or cry out, was gagged and bound and then hurried away down the alley, along a deserted street, and finally dragged into a low, tumble-down house, where he was taken to a small square room on the upper floor and released.

His outer garments were then taken from him and he himself placed in a chair in the middle of the room, to which he was securely bound.

At that moment a man appeared carrying a lantern, which he hung upon a hook in the ceiling.

"Dan Deacon!" cried Jack. "What new piece of deviltry is this?"

"You know me, I see?"

"Would that I did not!" thought Jack. "To think that this fiend is my father!"

"You got away last night?"

"As you see."

"If I had stayed about you wouldn't. I had other matters to look after then. This time, though, I'm going to fix you. Is the thing all ready, Pipes?"

"Yes," grunted a man standing by what seemed to be a window closely barred.

"Then we might as well get to work!"

"Yes."

"What would you do?" asked Jack.

"Kill you."

"Kill your own son!" cried Jack in agony. "Dan Deacon, or Daniel Steele, as you really are, do you not know me? I am your son, though with bitter shame do I confess it."

Dan gasped, looked at the boy for an instant, colored deeply, and then clenching his fist, struck a heavy blow upon the little table which nearly upset it, and cried, angrily:

"So you're ashamed to own it, are you? Well, so am I! Who told you this?"

"It matters not. My informant was well posted," for Jack did not wish to betray the old man, for whom he had always felt a certain regard.

"Well, I s'pose it's true," laughed Deacon. "I'm Dan Steele, sure enough, but that information will do you no good. Son of mine, as you are, you're in my way, and I sacrifice my own brother in such a case."

"Are you a devil, Daniel Steele? I need not ask since it was you who murdered your cousin Regi—"

"Stop his mouth, Pipes," hissed the other, and Jack was instantly gagged.

"I'm going to tell you something, Jack Steele—for that's your name, fast enough," said Dan, with an uneasy laugh, "and then I'm going away."

"This man here is called Pipes, on account of an invention of his'n. This room can be made water-tight, and at the corners, at the bottom, are a lot of pipes by which it can be flooded.

"Do you see that fancy brass knob opposite you? Well, that's a gauge, and when it reaches the top of that panel the water will fill the room. Keep your eye on that, for it may amuse you!"

What devilish invention was this that the villain meant?

Alas! he would know all too soon!

"Come along, Peleg," said Deacon. "We'll drop in an hour from now, and see how he looks."

Then the two men went out and Jack heard the sound of screws outside, the door being evidently made so tight that not even a breath of air could penetrate at the sides or bottom.

Presently Jack heard a sound as of water running, but to this he paid no attention until he suddenly felt a chill in his feet.

Darting a hasty glance at the floor he discovered the cause of this.

There was a depth of three inches of water upon the floor, and it was constantly rising higher.

In an instant the truth flashed upon him.

He was to be drowned like a rat in a trap.

CHAPTER IX.

A FIEND'S INGENUITY—WHAT MATT DID.

THE situation of our hero was indeed a perilous one.

The room in which he sat imprisoned was about ten feet square and about the same in height, there being but one door, and this a narrow one, being flush with the wall when closed.

There was no carpet on the floor, and the walls were hard and glistening, painted a light drab with gilt panels, the ceiling being light blue and somewhat dome-shaped, rising higher in the center than at the sides.

All the furniture the place contained was the chair to which Jack was secured, and a little table.

Though Jack knew it not, the place had been fitted up with an ingenuity that only a devil could possess, and had on more than one occasion been used for the purpose to which it was now put.

There were no windows to the place, though there appeared to be, and the door, fitted with rubber washers at the top, bottom and sides, could be closed so securely by means of screws and bolts as to make it air and water tight.

That was just what it was meant to be.

The walls were of iron, painted to represent wood and plaster, and the flooring could be removed, there being a stone one beneath it.

Pipes had so contrived the place that by working a pump in his cellar he could flood this room, not a drop of water escaping by the door, and then let the water out by opening valves at the bottom, until then closed by means of air pressure, the scoundrel having an air pump and other apparatus which he required for the furtherance of his diabolical plans.

The chair upon which Jack sat was fastened to the floor by screws, a fact which he now ascertained upon endeavoring to rise.

Inch by inch the water arose, and now Jack found himself watching the gauge on the wall as it went up and up, recording the rise of the water.

There is no light save that of the lantern suspended from the hook above his head, but there is enough to see by, and as he sits there he can distinguish too well the slowly-moving gauge upon the wall opposite.

Higher and higher yet rises the water, chilling his blood and sending a strange thrill through him.

It rises to his ankles, then to his calves, finally flowing over his knees and upon his lap.

Steadily and quickly it rises, now to his waist, higher and higher till it is breast deep, and then under his armpits, with no hope of stopping.

He can hear the steady pulsation of the pumps, hear the gurgling

and swashing as the cold stream is forced through the pipes, hear the ripple as it beats against the walls, see it steadily rising, higher and higher yet, until now it is up to his shoulders, and still rising. Will it never stop? Will it rise above his head until it fills the room?

Will the villain not relent, or will he carry out his threat and drown his own son in this inhuman fashion?

Has he no pity, no remorse, no tender feelings, no fear of retribution?

Is there no help for him?

These and a hundred other questions Jack asks himself as he sits there, bound and helpless, the water rising higher and higher every instant.

He is powerless to cry out, or he would make one more appeal to the inhuman wretch who he blushes to call father, would beseech him to spare him the agony of such a death.

Life is sweet to everyone, and the poor fellow, brave as he is, is loath to die at such a time, when life is so full of hope and promise, and for the moment he feels that he could beg even this villain to let him live.

But he cannot speak, and if he could there is no one to hear him, no one to answer his pitiful cries.

And higher yet rises that chilling flood, till it surrounded his throat—a veritable hand of death clutching him with its icy fingers—till it reached his chin, his lips, his nose, and rising higher and higher still, threatens soon to sweep over his head and cover him from sight.

The poor boy draws a long breath and struggles to burst his bonds, to stand upon the chair and cheat death of a few moments.

But no, he cannot do it, and higher and higher yet the waters rise until his dark hair floats upon the surface and alone tells of his presence there.

Higher and higher yet, and now the clustering locks are covered and naught is left to break the level surface of the water, rising, ever rising, cold and pitiless.

Strange sounds are in the poor boy's ears, fierce pains shoot through his brain, he seems afire one moment and freezing the next, while now his very heart seems like to burst!

He can hold his breath no longer, but to open his mouth is death, strangulation; to keep it closed is to burst a blood-vessel.

He cannot endure it longer, his strength is giving way, his brain is reeling, his heart is bursting, and then all is dark.

Good Heaven! what is that?

Is this a fancy, or does he hear his name called?

Is it a mockery, or are those the tones of Matt's voice calling frantically to him, and bidding him awake?

And then what torture he seems to be going through with; what racking pains, as though a thousand fiends were pinching him with red-hot irons!

They beat, and pound, and stab from head to foot all at once, and no cessation; they pull and maul and throw him down on hot stones, which burn and cut until it seems as though his head would fly off with the pain.

Then suddenly he loses consciousness and the pains cease, and after what seems to be a long time, he is battling with some unseen, unknown foe, and struggling fiercely for life.

It is dark, and he can see nothing, but he knows that some horrible foe is near and trying to seize him, can almost feel the bony fingers clutching his throat, hear the mocking laugh ringing in his ears.

"Jack! Dear Jack, wake up; rouse yourself, speak to me. Oh, my God, will he die after all?"

Who is it that speaks to him thus?

Is he dead, and does he only fancy these strange things, or is he really battling with death and struggling hard for the blessed life?

"Jack! Jack! Will he never answer me? Ah! he breathes, the color glows in his cheeks, he lives, he lives! Thank God, he lives!"

And then Jack opens his eyes, and finds himself lying in bed in a strange place, with Matt, yes, and with Ada herself, bending over him with loving glances.

The dear girl bends lower now, and taking the loved face between her hands, kisses it tenderly, and says:

"Ah, I knew you would come to life again, Jack, if I called you."

"What place is this?" asked Jack, in great bewilderment. "How did I come here? How long have I—"

"Don't you ask too many questions, Jack, or Miss Ada won't have time to answer 'em. Der doctor said I was ter give yer dis as soon as yer woke up, and ye've got ter take it."

Thereupon Matt made Jack swallow some colorless liquid which had a slightly bitter, though aromatic taste, and when he had done so he fell back upon the pillow, his head upon one side, and in another instant he was fast asleep.

It was a calm, peaceful sleep now, racked by no tormenting visions, troubled by no harrowing thoughts, disturbed by no pain, and as he slept there as peacefully as a child Ada quickly withdrew, and left Matt to watch by the bedside, faithful fellow that he was, until such time as Jack should awake.

"How did it all happen, Matt?" he asks when he awakes, many hours having passed.

"What do you remember last?"

"Being in that horrible place, the water over my head, and hearing someone call my name."

"That was me, Jack, and I pulled ye out, though I declare I hadn't no time to lose."

"But how did you do it? How did you find me?"

"Well, I'll tell yer; for ye're all right now, and can stand it. After you'd gone I thought I'd go out, too, for I didn't fancy havin' ye go out alone. I reckoned suthin' would go wrong."

"I had just got out when I see ye go down an alley and turn; I heerd a noise and run up just in time to see yer hurried down the alley by two blokes muffled up to the eyes."

"I skipped along to der next street and bolted down and around to the alley where I seen the men hurrying away with yer."

"I follered 'em, but couldn't get very near, though I seen 'em goin' into a house, which I spotted, and was just goin' for the police when I saw someone come out."

"I dropped down so's not to be seen, and by the street-lamp saw the feller's face. It was Dan Deacon, and he was muttering something about gettin' even with you this time; and then he looked up and down to see if there was any one in sight, after which he went inside and locked the door."

"I knew I couldn't get in, so I went to the next house but one, which I saw was a lodging-house, and engaged a room on the top floor for the night."

"You bet I wasn't long in gettin' on the roof and crawling over to this one. I had to drop quite a ways, 'cause this is lower than the rest, and then I broke in at the scuttle."

"I was in a little sort of garret, all dark and without no way of getting out, but after a while I lit a match and found a trap-door with a ring in it."

"I could hear water running, and didn't understand it, but by tuggin' away at that ring I pulled up the trap and a lighted lantern with it, and saw you in the water tied fast to a chair."

"I jumped in, cut the ropes, pulled you out, and when the water reached the top, which it soon did, climbed out and fetched you to my own room."

"It was a long time before I roused you, and then you were delirious and out of your head, and I had you carried to the hotel, and Miss Ada herself come to nurse you, and it was a week before you scarcely breathed, but now you're all hunk, and I'm just glad of it, for it serves you right."

CHAPTER X.

THE MYSTERY DEEPENS—DEFIANCE.

"AND it is a week since that dreadful night, Matt?" asked Jack.

"Yes, and more. We thought you'd never come around. I sent for Steele, when he come up to Harrow the next day, and when Miss Ada heard it she came herself by special train, she and Ned, and we all took care of you."

"And Deacon—where is he?"

"Nobody knows; and the old man that you used to live with, Old Mose, he's gone, no one knows where."

"That villain of a Deacon has killed him then."

"Now, don't you get excited. There were no trains run till the next day, and the first one from Preston found that car that we left burned to bits, and the robbers gone. There isn't a trace of 'em left."

"Another feller has been running your train, but I stayed with you, and as soon as you're all right Steele is going to put you on the road ag'in. Do you know, though, that he don't half like the idea of Miss Ada's nursing you?"

"Ah! he knows that I am the son of Dan Deacon," thought Jack, "and is down on me for it. I wish I wasn't."

Simon Steele, the rich railroad president, sat in his library in his elegant residence at Harrow, having a house there which he usually occupied during the summer, but where he had now been living for a few days, when a visitor was announced.

"Do you know him, Michael?"

"Faix, I don't; but he give me this bit of a note, and said it was importhant."

Simon Steele took the bit of folded paper, opened it, and read as follows:

"SIMON:—I must see you. Don't dare to refuse or it will be your ruin.
DAN."

"Show the gentleman in and leave us alone."

In a moment Dan Deacon, so-called, disguised as an old man, entered the room, and after the servant had departed he locked the door, threw off his wig and beard, and drawing an easy chair up to the fire, said abruptly:

"Simon, I want an understanding."

"What sort of one?"

"I want a divvy. Here you are, enjoying all this property, and I haven't a penny."

"You have money enough, though goodness only knows where you get it, Dan."

"Well, I want some of yours. I want my boy's share, anyhow. If I liked I could claim my own."

"Yes, and be arrested for the murder of your cousin Reginald!"

"Don't say that to me again," hissed Dan, "or I will murder you!"

"I think not, Daniel Steele. I am always ready for that."

"Now, look here, Simon," said Dan, more coolly. "We're both of us in a fix. Suppose Reginald's son should turn up. He'd have the whole thing."

"Do you threaten me with that?"

"Yes, if you say anything about this murder business. I know where he is, but if you'll marry your daughter——"

"Aha! I begin to see," laughed Simon. "Your Master Tracy is the missing boy, eh?"

"Yes, but he don't know it, and we ain't agoin' to tell him unless it becomes necessary."

"What if your son, Jack Quick as he is known, discovers his parentage, and comes forward to claim the——"

"He knows it already, Simon!"

"What! Then we are ruined."

"Maybe not, and that's what I want an agreement about. Marry Ada to Tracy. Get this Jack out o' the way, and then we're all right."

"Man! Would you sacrifice your own son?"

"If he stood in my way, yes. If we could make more by acknowledging him I'd do it, but——"

"But you daren't tell him that you are Daniel Steele," and the man laughed coldly. "Even now you are obliged to go about in disguise."

"Say no more about that, Simon. Will you give Ada to——"

"I can't, Dan; she hates him. I must not sacrifice Jack either, for I have grown to love him."

"Then I'll tell you what I'll do. I can send Ned to States prison."

"My God, man? What do you——"

"I mean it!" and he uttered the words coldly, slowly, and with the utmost deliberation. "If you mean business, meet me on the railway bridge just beyond Harrow at eleven o'clock on the up side of the river."

"Eleven? Jack's train is due shortly after that."

"I know it. If you are not there both he and Ned will be sacrificed. I'll put Tracy up to this business, and we will claim the property and make you a beggar!"

"I will be there!" gasped Simon Steele, in a hoarse whisper.

"All right. We'll settle the whole business at that time," and

replacing his wig and beard, putting on his hat and cloak, and picking up his stick, Dan Steele, alias Deacon, left the apartment.

Jack had recovered sufficiently to take his place on the road once more, but for the last two or three days he had been running the day express from Preston, leaving there at two o'clock in the afternoon, making a quick run of little less than five hours, and after an hour's interval, returning at a slower rate, being due at Harrow shortly after eleven at night and Preston at two in the morning.

It was now nine o'clock, and the bridge was about fifteen minutes' walk from Mr. Steele's, so that he had fully an hour and thirty minutes before he need start.

The little clock on the mantel had struck the quarter-hour before two o'clock, when Mr. Steele heard the outer door open, and presently Ned entered the library, a flushed look on his face and a strange excitement in his manner.

"Why, Ned, I thought you were in Preston."

"I came up by the 5:30, and have just got here. It doesn't go as fast as Jack's train. I wanted to see you, dad, about something," and the young fellow sat down uneasily.

"Well, Ned, what is it? You look nervous and troubled," and the man remembered what Dan had said.

"Don't interrupt me, father, but let me go on in my own way."

"You used to call me dad, Ned. Why do you drop it? You don't love me, or I you, any the less?"

"No, no, dad, dear dad, not a bit. But I have been afraid—— Well, I'm in trouble, but since I've known Jack, and seen how brave he is—— Well, I'm not the weak fellow I was, and I'm going to face the thing out and defy Mr. Tracy Tufts to do his worst."

A great change for the better had come over Ned, and he was no longer the weak fellow he had been, but seemed to have imbibed some of Jack's manliness, and now, come what might, he determined to face his troubles, confide in his father, and bring the whole thing to an issue at once.

He, therefore, began and told the whole affair from beginning to end, how he had forged a check, which Tracy had indorsed, knowing it to be so, although he had given him the money for it, and how the young scoundrel had the thing now in his possession, and threatened to expose him unless he complied with his demands.

He did not attempt to excuse himself or offer any palliation for the offense, but told the whole thing bravely, saying in conclusion;

"Now you know all, dad, and if this rascal wants to send me to prison, I am ready, but Ada shall not be sacrificed."

"Now I can face Dan," thought Steele, "for, knowing his game, I will block it. Ned shall not go to prison, and if this villain threatens me I will cause his arrest, and more than that, swear that this protege of his is an impostor. I have already gone too far in getting hold of this property to let it slip easily through my fingers."

"What do you advise me to do, dad?" asked Ned, noticing the look on his father's face, and misconstruing it to mean distrust of himself.

"Do, Ned?" returned the other with an encouraging smile. "Hold your own against this fellow, and trust to me to outwit him. I am glad you told me of this affair, for while I do not excuse you, I can understand the circumstances. Leave it to me, Ned, and I will get this paper yet."

"And you won't let him have Ada, will you, dad?"

"No," answered the older man, sternly, adding, to himself: "I will defy Dan Steele yet, and if I cannot frighten him with this story, do with him as I have done before with troublesome customers!"

At this moment the little clock struck the half-hour after ten, Ned having occupied considerable time in telling his story, making many pauses before he got through, which took up more time than it would have ordinarily done.

"I shall be busy now, Ned," said the railroad president, glancing at the clock, "and shall have to beg you to excuse me. Have no fear concerning this matter, for I will straighten it all out, and you will never hear any more about it."

"Thank you, dad; you have taken a great load off my mind," and bidding his father good-night, the now light-hearted lad retired to an inner room, leaving his father alone.

As the town clocks were striking eleven Simon Steele, well wrapped up, for the night was clear and cold, stepped from the railway bridge upon the further side of the river and gave utterance to a low whistle.

At the sound a man stepped out from behind the bridge-keeper's house and whispered:

"You are punctual."

"Yes. I know what your game is now, Dan Steele, and I defy you! If I don't have that bit of forged paper which your protege holds by to-morrow morning I will denounce you as a murderer!"

"Ha! You would throw me over, eh? You mean to have the whole thing to yourself. Never mind, Simon, I will cheat you yet. Do you know what I am going to do? Kill you first and then leave this bridge open!"

"Villain! Is not one murder enough upon your conscience?" cried Simon, leaping back upon the bridge, closely followed by Dan, whose tightly-clenched hands, loud breathing, and glittering eye showed too plainly what a devil had been aroused within him.

"Curse you!" he hissed. "We'll see whether you'll go back on me or not!"

Whoo-oo!

Jack's train is now close at hand, and in a few minutes will come thundering across the bridge.

"My God! the train!" shrieks Steele. "We must not stay here."

"I must not, indeed; but I've got to settle with you first," cries Dan, as he seizes his cousin in a strong grasp.

They are in the middle of the bridge, upon which there is but a single track; the river, filled with tossing lumps of ice, dashing over the huge projecting bowlders far below.

"Unhand me!" cries Steele, in terror, vainly endeavoring to release himself.

"Not until I have let out your miserable life," hisses Dan, drawing a murderous-looking knife.

Then begins a desperate struggle for the mastery, and at that moment their forms are thrown into strong relief by a glare of light. The bridge trembles violently, and Jack's engine is rushing down upon them at lightning speed.

CHAPTER XI.

JACK'S TERRIBLE DILEMMA.

"PRETTY cold to-night, eh, Matt?"

"Yes, and we'll get it worse when we reach the flats."

"There's no chance of another such adventure to-night, though, as we had a couple of weeks ago."

"No, it's kind o' funny, ain't it?"

"What is funny, Matt?"

"That them fellers haven't turned up, nor yet Dan Deacon, nor old Mose?"

"Yes, I don't care about the rest, but I'd like to know where Mose is. I should hate to have the old fellow come to harm."

Thus Jack and Matt chatted as they rushed along, the snow glittering in the light of the engine, the stars twinkling overhead, the sparks flying behind them and the wind whistling about them.

They were approaching the bridge over the Harrow river, and beyond that lay Harrow itself, and then the flats, which would always awaken exciting memories in Jack's heart, and then their homeward journey would be half done and they could think of a warm lunch at "Jerry's," in Preston, and a fine snooze after that until the next afternoon.

"The bridge is all right," said Matt, "there's no signal out."

"Then I'll run right slap across, for I'm a trifle behind time."

The train leaped upon the bridge, and Jack looked out, not that he feared any danger, but simply because it was his habit to do so occasionally.

As he glanced ahead of him, he suddenly uttered a cry of dismay.

"Look there, Matt!"

Right in front of the engine, in the middle of the track, bracing their feet between the crossties, and struggling fiercely for life, were two men—their forms showing up with remarkable distinctness in the glare of light which flooded them.

"By George! they will both be killed."

"Mercy on us! Do you know who those men are?"

"One's Dan Deacon!"

"And the other is Simon Steele, president of this railroad!"

Poor Jack was in a terrible dilemma, and he would have given anything to get out of it.

He cared not if he ran over Dan Deacon, for that would be only taking revenge for the man's attempt upon his own life.

If he killed Dan Deacon, however, he would also kill Mr. Steele, a catastrophe which he wished to avoid, by all means.

He might possibly stop his engine in time, and indeed that had been his first thought, his hands mechanically seeking the lever and throttle, while he hastily directed Matt to sound the call for down brakes.

Suppose he should run ahead, however, and rid the earth forever of this wretch?

Could he have done so without danger to Mr. Steele, we must admit that he would not have hesitated for an instant, for he was but human after all, and this man had twice tried to kill him, and might do so again if he had the chance.

But Mr. Steele would then be killed, and this he would not permit if avoidable, having a sincere regard for the man, and desiring to save him if he could.

There seemed little chance of doing this, however, for the engine was now almost upon the two struggling combatants, and unless something prevented, they would both soon be thrown down and trampled to death by the iron horse.

Even should they fall between the ties, there was the river below, and to fall into its icy waters, among the rough rocks and jagged masses of floating ice, would be as certain a death as being run over by the engine.

All this transpired in the shortest possible time, Jack's thoughts rushing through his brain at a terrible speed, and although scarcely a minute had passed since he had first seen the peril of the two men, it seemed a very age.

Suddenly drawing his pistol, he reached far out, and taking careful aim, fired at the uplifted knife in Deacon's hand.

In another minute it would have descended and drank Simon Steele's life blood.

At that exciting moment, however, the bullet, speeding to its mark, struck the blade squarely, flattened against it, and sent the knife whirling through the air and down into the icy current below.

With a puff and a snort, the engine glides quickly ahead, and now the combatants are almost touched by the pilot.

There is a sudden cry, and then both men fall between the ties. There is a splash, a muttered ejaculation, and then the train passes over the place, while Jack utters a groan and staggers back into his seat.

The engine presently stops just over the river, and Jack leaps out and hurries back, a nameless terror filling his breast.

He hurries along the little foot path at the side of the track, and now and again calls the name of the president, hoping, perhaps in vain, to receive answer.

He has repeated this cry several times, when suddenly he hears a faint response.

"Jack! Jack! Where are you?"

It is Mr. Steele's voice that asks the question, and the brave lad is nearly wild with excitement.

"Here!" he shouts. "But where are you?"

"Here, under the last car. Make haste or I shall lose my hold."

Jack now locates the sound of the man's voice, and hurrying on, stops, bends down, and discovers Mr. Steele clinging to the crossties with both hands, but threatening to lose his grasp at any moment.

Jack throws himself under the car, and seizing the man's collar, drags him from between the ties just as his hold gives way and he is about to fall.

He nearly escapes from the boy as it is, but with a strength born of despair, and the desire to save the man, Jack exerts himself to the utmost, and soon has the man safely landed on the track.

"Thank Heaven!" murmurs the boy, devoutly. "I feared you had been killed."

"You have saved my life, Jack!" gasps the president, getting upon his feet. "This is the second time you have made me indebted to you."

"Say no more about it, sir. I should have been inconsolable if you had perished."

"Did you see with whom I was struggling?"

"Yes."

"Is he killed?"

"I do not know, sir. He must have fallen into the river, for I heard a splash as I passed over."

"I will have it dragged to-morrow," murmured the man, half to

himself. "I will go into the cab," he added, "until we reach Harrow, and then I shall get off."

"Did this man attack you, sir?" asked Jack, after they had started on again, the boy seeming to feel that the mystery of his own life was somehow interwoven with the lives of both those men.

"Yes, my boy, but let us not think of this now. Some day I will tell you all. Let it suffice to say that if Daniel Steele—Deacon, I mean—is dead, that is the last of one of your bitterest enemies."

Jack said no more, and in a few minutes the Harrow station was reached, and Mr. Steele got out, took a cab, and was driven to his residence, where Ned had not even noticed his absence.

"It is very strange," thought Jack, as he made the run across the flats. "I sometimes think that Dan Deacon cannot be my father—that old Mose was mistaken, and that the mystery is a deeper one than even he can fathom. Still, the old man may be right. I must discover his hiding-place, for perhaps I may then solve this perplexing problem."

While Jack is thus musing, Simon Steele, seated once more by the pleasant fire in his cozy library, thus communes with himself:

"There is little doubt that the man is dead. My poor Ned and Ada are safe from his schemings at last. This villain of Dan's, he will not dare to press this matter unaided by his protector. I have money enough to silence him, and Ned is safe."

He would not have been so sure of that had he known of another plot against his son, and one which bade fair to ruin him, Dan Deacon alive or dead, notwithstanding.

CHAPTER XII.

NED'S DEFIANCE.

THE Preston Varieties a second class theater of unenviable reputation, is crowded to the doors, the air being thick with tobacco smoke, to say nothing of the fumes of bad whisky and worse beer which the auditors are freely imbibing, little tables being scattered all through the place, and each bearing from one to a dozen glasses.

Grace Grant, "operatic vocalist and danseuse," as she is called on the bills, is at present executing a *pas seul* in the center of the stage, some thirty or forty scantily attired ballet girls being arranged in a semi-circle behind her.

She is rather pretty, is Grace Grant, but too many late suppers, too many champagne parties have told upon her, and it takes more than the usual amount of rouge and powder necessary to counteract the bright glare of the footlights and calcium to cover up the traces of care and dissipation upon her face.

Seated in a proscenium-box, concealed from the audience by the heavy curtains which draped the sides, but commanding a good view of the stage itself, are Tracy Tufts and—yes, there is no mistake about it—Ned Steele himself.

A bottle of wine and two half-filled glasses are upon the little table before them, and both young men have cigars between their teeth, though Ned has allowed his to go out while looking at the stage.

Can it be that the performance has so much attraction for him, and that he has already forgotten his good intentions, that he consents to be found in close companionship with Tracy Tufts?

No, he has not forgotten them, but he has ventured purposely into the lion's den, having conceived a bold plan which it will require all his coolness and nerve to carry out.

Presently Grace finishes her dance and retires, the girls perform two or three figures, and then comes the finale, in which Grace joins, and then they all form a group, lit up by various colored lights, and the curtain falls amid great applause.

It is raised once more, and then at last Grace retires to the green-room, where Ned joins her, having slipped away from Tufts.

"Grace," he says quickly, "you are my wife, are you not?"

"Yes," she says, with a laugh, as she crosses her feet so as to display her white satin slippers to the best advantage, "though you have always kept mighty still about it."

"Suppose I should repudiate you and try to marry somebody else?"

"You dare not!" she cried, springing to her feet and facing him angrily. "I would kill the woman first, and then you!"

"Easy, Grace, easy," said Ned. "I am not going to do anything of the sort. I don't mind you so much, Grace, though you are the daughter of Dan Deacon, and are rather too wild to lead a strictly domestic life."

"I have never been false to you, Ned, since the day of our secret marriage. I have never pressed you to make it known to the world."

"No, you have not, and I thank you for that, Grace. Let me tell you, too, that I do not mean to marry any one else till the law gives me the right—till you are dead."

"Then what do you——"

"Listen, Grace. I must be brief, for I hear some of the actors coming."

"They won't disturb us here."

"There is a plot on foot, Grace, to make you swear that you are the wife of Jack Quick, so as to prevent him from marrying Ada."

"I will never do it!" she cries, fiercely. "I'll have nothing to do with my father's plots, so far as they tend to such a matter. I am your wife, and I will swear it against them all."

"Then preserve your marriage lines, Grace, for if these villains get possession——"

"Who do you mean? My father?"

"And Tracy Tufts. Grace, do me a favor, and I swear I will acknowledge you as my wife before all the world."

"Yes!" she cried, excitedly, for since her secret marriage to Ned, now more than a year previous, she had been true to the young man, and was really trying to lead an exemplary life, despite the many temptations which were thrown in her path.

"Yes," she continued, "I will do it, if possible. What do you require of me?"

"Get away from Tufts a certain paper which he has—a forged note which I once altered. Get that away——"

"This is his influence over you?"

"Yes. Get it away, and I can defy him. It concerns you as much as myself."

"I will do it. Do you know who Tracy Tufts is, Ned?"

"Only Tracy Tufts. Who else should he be, Grace?"

"That is not his name. He is a Steele like yourself."

"What!" cried Ned, in great astonishment.

"He is Dan Deacon's own son—my brother."

"By Jove! Does he know this?"

"No, but I do, and so does Dan. Jack Quick thinks he is Dan's son, but he is not."

"Aha! I thought it strange that Dan should want to kill his own son, as he has more than once tried to do with Jack."

"That wouldn't stop him if the young fellow was in the way."

"But who is Jack, then?"

"I don't know. He is not the son of Dan Deacon or Dan Steele, that is certain."

"Hush! Here is Tracy. I know his step. Not a word of this, but get that paper if you can."

The young rone entered at this juncture, smoking a cigar, and after walking somewhat unsteadily across the floor, sank down in a large easy-chair not far from the anxious pair.

"Look here, Grace," said he, somewhat thickly, "would you like to earn a thousand dollars?"

"No; I have all the money that's good for me now."

"Well, perhaps you'll do what I want for nothing?"

"What is it?"

"Send Ned away."

"He shall stay here if he likes. In fact, I prefer it."

"Oh, well, it can't make much difference, 'cause he knows what it's all about. He can help us, 'cause he writes such a good hand. Ha—ha! that's a good one!"

Ned bit his lips, and in a few minutes Tracy made the proposition of which Ned had already informed her, adding, in conclusion:

"Ned'll fix the 'stificate up, if that's necessary, and then we get rid of Jack Quick. We don't seem to be able to get rid of him in any other way."

"And you'll give me one thousand dollars to swear that he is my husband?"

"That's enough, ain't it?"

"No; I want more than that. I want a paper which you have been holding over Ned's head. Give me that, and——"

"Grace, would you——"

"Be quiet," said the woman, and, giving Ned a warning look which he readily understood, she repeated her demand.

"Will you do the job for that?"

"Yes."

"All right; I'll give you that little bit of paper which has been so valuable to me as soon as the thing is done."

"I must have it first, or I will not stir a step in the business."

The rone rose to his feet in a perfect passion, his face livid with rage.

"Then I'll denounce him!" he shrieked, "and publish your marriage to the world! It'll look well, won't it, to have folks know that the millionaire's son is married to a ballet dancer—a low character, a com——"

Ned sprang forward and seized the villain by the throat.

"Take care!" he hissed, "this woman is my wife, and you shall not insult her in my presence!"

"Let me go!" gasped Tracy. "Let me go, I say, or I'll ruin you both! I'll tell the whole world that Ned Steele is a thief!"

"And I'll tell the whole world that you are the son of Dan Deacon, the murderer of his cousin—that your income is derived from Dan's business as a forger and counterfeiter, that he does not own you as his son—that you are a blackmailer and a villain."

Tracy was astounded, but Ned was perfectly dumfounded as these family secrets came out, and he knew not whether to believe the evidence of his senses, or whether it were not all some hideous dream.

"What do you say?" cried Tracy, turning pale. "I the son of Dan Deacon, and your brother? I the son of that villain, the brother of——"

"Yes, you are all this. Ask Dan himself. He may not be found very easily since that accident of his the other night."

"Ask Dan himself?"

"Yes. The fall into the icy river has cooled him off, and he'll be able to talk without getting mad. He may not want to show himself, however, after having tried to kill Simon Steele."

"What is all this?" cried Ned. "I did not know that my father had been in any danger."

"He probably told Jack to say nothing about it. Now, Mr. Tracy Tufts, you don't hold as many trumps as you thought you did. Is it to be a case of blab, or will you give me that paper?"

"I don't want it," said Ned, boldly. "My father knows all, and I have nothing to fear from the accusation of such a villain. Let him look to his own reputation first, before trying to destroy mine."

Tracy Tufts was in a fever of rage, for he knew that he was baffled where he had expected nothing but success.

Ned had at last asserted himself and turned upon his tormentor, and Tracy's power was forever lost.

Taking the paper from his pocket—the very one which he thought so valuable to him—he tore it into a hundred pieces and hurled them like a miniature snow storm into the fire, hissing out in his rage:

"There it goes! I give up that weapon, and now I meet you on equal grounds. Let me tell you now, Ned Steele, I will marry your sister in spite of you—in spite of the devil!"

"Take care how you affront your master, Tracy Deacon!" cried Ned, the name causing the villain to turn to the color of ashes, "for let me tell you that you will never marry Ada Steele, and that I defy you!"

Then Grace and Ned left the green-room, and shortly after the theater as well, Ned murmuring to himself, after seeing Grace to her carriage:

"I must tell Jack what I have learned. There are obstructions ahead, I fear, but the lad is brave enough to ride over them all, if he can only see his road clear."

CHAPTER XIII.

JACK HEARS MATTERS OF GREAT IMPORTANCE.

WHILE Ned had been learning the secrets of the Steele family, Jack was looking for old Mose, not believing him dead, but hidden away somewhere.

Dan Deacon had not appeared since his fall from the bridge, and Jack supposed him dead, not knowing he had escaped by the merest chance.

The river at times was filled with floating driftwood, and Dan had seized hold of a huge log when he came to the surface after his sudden plunge, and upon this had been carried down stream.

No one but Grace knew of his safety, and she would have told no one had it not suited her purpose to threaten Tracy with exposure, and she knew, of course, that he would not betray Dan.

"How are we going to find Mose?" asked Jack of Matt the day after the disappearance of Deacon.

"Hunt up some of the gang."

"But they are as scarce as five-dollar gold pieces in a contribution box. The police are after them for that job the other day, and it is not likely that they will show themselves."

"Well, we must hunt for them, that's all."

"Easy enough to say hunt, but where?"

"Go to the old house where you used to live."

"And get caught?"

"Go in disguise. I'll go, too."

The idea was at once adopted, though with modifications; for, instead of going directly to the house, they entered the one next door to it, which was unoccupied, went on the roof, and then made their way in by the scuttle, which they wrenched from its fastenings.

While Matt remained on the roof to reconnoiter, Jack crept cautiously down the ladder to the top floor, and then began making his way along the hall toward the stairs, when he suddenly heard voices.

There was a door close to him, and throwing this open, he darted into a bare, empty room and listened.

The voices were now directly beneath him.

What could it mean?

It was dark in the room, but over in one corner a broad track of light shot upwards to the ceiling.

There was a hole in the floor, and the light came from the room below.

It was there the men were.

Removing his shoes, Jack made his way noiselessly across the boards until he reached the hole in the floor.

Part of a board had been torn off, and the plastering beneath had fallen away so as to make a hole two feet in length and half a foot wide.

Looking through this aperture, Jack saw three men sitting in the room below, which had formerly been his own.

These men were the very ones he most wished to see.

They were a part of the gang that had attacked the train.

From them he must learn where Mose was.

"Ain't it kind o' risky coming here?" asked one.

"Not at all, for the fly cops'll think we dassin't come here, and so won't bother to watch it."

"It's as good as any, and besides, while Mose is in the cellar, we must come here."

Here was one point gained for Jack, then.

"We'll have to get him out and take him to the other place to-night."

"Not if I know it," thought Jack.

"Yes, for he's useful to us. All we don't want is his talking to that young fellow Jack."

"He must be got rid of, too. Dan is missing, but we know his orders."

"But if he's his son, I don't see what he wants——"

"He ain't Dan Deacon's son any more than you are."

"The deuce he ain't!"

"No."

Here, then, was another point for Jack, and he was so surprised that he could hardly repress an exclamation of astonishment.

"Whose son is he, then?"

The man leaned across the table and whispered something in his companion's ear.

Jack, in his eagerness to catch the word, bent far down and changed his position to another board so as to bring him nearer to the hole.

The board was loose, and when Jack's weight was put upon one end the other suddenly flew up.

Jack fell off, but his right arm shot from under him and went clear through the opening.

At the same time the board fell back with a bang.

"What's that?" cried all three men, leaping to their feet in an instant.

"Look there!"

"A spy!"

"Jack Quick, as I live!"

They had seen his arm, though it was quickly withdrawn, and also his face.

It was not there at the opening more than a second, but that was enough.

"Capture him!"

"Kill him!"

"Don't let him escape!"

Thus cried the three men as they made for the door.

There was not a moment to lose.

Jumping into his shoes, Jack made for the door, shut it with a bang and fastened it on the inside.

Did he mean to voluntarily lock himself up in a trap?

Not at all.

He knew that in a few minutes the men would be upon this floor and in this room.

In these few minutes he could get into the room below.

Those few minutes were precious to him, and he determined to make good use of them.

Throwing aside the loose plank, he had an aperture a foot in width and two in length.

Catching hold of the next plank, he ripped it up, making the hole eighteen inches in width.

This would more than suffice.

With his feet he broke away the plastering below.

Crash!

It fell into the lower room with a rattle and a cloud of dust.

The lamp was thrown from the table and broken.

The scattered oil caught fire, and in a moment the room was full of flame and smoke.

There was no turning back, for all that.

Lowering himself into the opening, Jack dropped through and struck the floor upon his feet.

All this happened in less than two minutes.

As Jack struck the floor the men reached the door of the room above.

"He is in here."

"He must be, for the door is closed on the inside."

"Yes, I can see the key."

Crash!

Three pairs of broad shoulders, three navy boots, three stout fists, caused the door to fly open.

"He is gone!"

"No; he is hiding in the closet!"

"Fire through the door!"

Crack! Crack! Crack!

Three reports rang out in rapid succession.

The door of the little closet is riddled with bullets.

One of the men throws it open.

There is no one there!

Suddenly a terrible discovery is made.

It is strange that they have not noticed it before.

The room below is all ablaze!

The smoke pours up through the hole in the floor, and looking down, they can see the flames rapidly spreading.

"Quick, or we shall be burned up!"

And what of Jack?

He has left the room and hastened below, and then to the cellar.

"If old Mose is there he must be saved at all hazards," mutters the brave lad.

Bursting open the cellar door, for it is locked, he dashes down the dark, precipitous steps and calls frantically:

"Mose, Mose! Where are you?"

"Here!" cries a feeble voice.

Jack knows the place well, and with fierce strides he reaches a heavy door at the further end of the cellar.

It is locked!

The flames will destroy the house and imprison him in a fiery furnace.

Can nothing be done?

Alas! it seems not.

Not daring to descend, and yet knowing that Jack was in peril, he hastily left his post, and entering the vacant house, ran down to the street.

Here he found a scene of the greatest excitement.

The flames had already burst from the windows, and a crowd, attracted by the sight, had gathered and were yelling like demons.

Two or three men hurriedly left the house, and now the fire engines came rattling down the street.

"Jack Quick is in that house!" yelled Matt. "Save him if you can!"

Everybody knew Jack, and at the mention of his name there arose a shout.

Matt seized an ax from a fireman, one of the engines having had just come up, and, with it in his hands, dashed into the house.

He met Jack in the lower hall before he had taken half a dozen steps.

"Thank God! you are safe!"

"Give me the ax, Matt; Mose is still in danger."

Seizing the weapon, Jack hurried below, and with a few hasty blows cut away the woodwork around the lock.

Then swinging open the door, he sprang inside, finding himself in a long, vaulted chamber, which he knew of, but had never been inside.

A hanging lamp illuminated the place for a short distance, but no one was in sight.

Jack shouted the name of the old man, but there was no response.

"It is very strange!" he murmured; "he was here but a moment ago, and now he has gone."

Taking down the lantern, he made his way along the passage, which was of considerable extent, till he came to the end against a solid stone wall.

There were no doors here, nor along the passage, and yet the place was empty.

He had found it locked, so that it was not possible that Mose could have gotten out during the short time that he was absent looking for the means to break in the door.

And yet the old man was gone!

The whole affair was most mysterious, and Jack was greatly puzzled.

Hurrying back to the main cellar, he examined the walls for traces of other doors, but could find none.

Then he hurried to the rear, where a door opened into a back yard.

This was closed and locked and the key gone, but Jack quickly smashed it open.

In the yard were fresh tracks in the snow, made by a pair of heavy boots.

He knew they were fresh, for the snow, where the thin crust had been broken through, was whiter than that in the other footprints in the yard.

These tracks led to the fence, and here there was an additional track, as if someone had been carrying a man on his back and set him down at this point.

"I have it!" cried the young man. "While I was getting the ax, somebody went below and carried the old man away. These tracks cannot have been made five minutes."

Indeed, they had not been made as long as that even.

"Someone has stood at the top of the fence on the other side and helped to lift the old man over," muttered Jack; "I can tell it by the disturbed snow on the top. Lucky I had this lantern."

The firemen now appeared in the little back yard, and seeing Jack, hailed him with a grand shout of welcome.

"Thought you had been done for, Jack," said one, grasping the boy's hand.

"Oh, no, Tom—I'm all right; but that villain Jake, or someone else, has carried off the old man, and I'd give anything to find him."

The house was now in a blaze, front and rear, although the flames were under control, so that there was no danger to any of the other houses.

"If you can see Matt, tell him I'm all right, and have gone after Mose!" cried Jack, and then springing to the top of the fence, he leaped over and entered the next house, fronting on another street.

There was no trace of either Mose or the villains, and at last, forced to the reluctant conclusion that he could do nothing more at that mo-

CHAPTER XIV.

A SERIES OF STARTLING INCIDENTS.

MATT, on the roof, heard the shots, and knew that something was up.

ment, Jack made his way around to his old house, found Matt, and then the two went home.

Jack stopped at a police station on the way and gave the sergeant what information he had, and then went on, passing the stage door of the Preston Varieties a few moments after Ned and Grace had left.

Early the next morning he and Matt went out upon their train, so that when Ned called he did not see Jack.

"Pshaw! I forgot about that," he muttered. "At any rate, the news will keep," and so he went away, not knowing that a part of his information was already known to Jack.

The train ran through in good time without accident or incident of any kind, but on the return several things were destined to occur.

First of all, when they arrived at Harrow, after passing over that bridge where Simon Steele had had such a narrow escape two days before, Jack received a message telling him to detain his train half an hour in order to let an excursion train get out of his way.

After reading the message the young man started towards the waiting-rooms to get something to eat, leaving Matt in charge, when he suddenly came face to face with a man hurrying towards the river.

It was Dan Deacon beyond a doubt.

"Hold on there, Dan Deacon, I want you!" cried Jack, endeavoring to detain him.

"Curse you for a meddling fool!" hissed the man, and now Jack was sure, for the voice was Dan's, though he had not seen the man's face, but judged it was he by his form and step alone.

"Aha, my man, not so fast!" and Jack hurried after, intending to give the rascal into custody for having attempted the life of the railroad president.

Dan had been forced to leave the regular path on account of Jack having given the alarm, and he now hastened over the snow directly towards the river, which below the bridge took a sharp turn, bringing it nearer the station.

Jack followed fast, not meaning to let the man escape, Dan having now broken into a quick run.

He reached the river and leaped upon the ice, which at this point completely bridged the stream, having been packed together very closely.

He had taken but ten steps when there came an ominous sound.

The ice had begun to move again, owing to the influence of the accumulating waters, and in a few moments it would break up.

Crash!

Even at that moment the large cake upon which Deacon stood separated from the rest and began gliding down stream.

At that instant Jack had cleared the gulf which had been suddenly formed between the ice and the bank, and leaped upon a huge cake.

"Stop!" he yelled to Deacon.

There was a tremendous grating and cracking, and there, in the midst of the stream, rushing along at full speed, were two large cakes of ice, the one bearing Deacon, the other carrying Jack.

Crack!

Crack!

The light of the moon, just emerging from the clouds, had shown Jack's presence to the scoundrel, and he fired two shots at him.

Crack!

Crack!

Not to be behind in politeness, Jack quickly responded with his own revolver, which he now always carried.

One of the bullets passed through the top of Dan's hat.

He answered at once, and then, as Jack's ice-raft, being smaller than the other, approached, a regular interchange of shots was kept up.

It was a singular scene.

The snow-lined banks of the river, the rushing torrent, choked with masses of ice and driftwood, the moon revealing the figures of two men engaged in mortal combat, both in danger of their lives from the river itself—both attempting to kill the other.

Not so in Jack's case, however, for what he wanted was merely to disarm Dan, not to kill him.

Shot after shot was exchanged, many of which came too near Jack's head for comfort, Dan being determined to kill him.

Suddenly Jack's raft struck against Dan's and the boy leaped upon it in an instant.

"Now, Dan Steele, surrender!" he cried, making a rush.

"Never!" and then both clutched, reeling to and fro upon the

mass of ice, which was fast breaking up in its mad course down the river.

Another danger was now in store for Jack, unless he could succeed in getting his prisoner ashore.

Not a quarter of a mile down was a dangerous fall, and toward this the cake of ice, upon which they were struggling so frantically, was now hastening at frightful speed.

CHAPTER XV.

THE STRUGGLE ON THE RIVER.

"If I die so shall you, Jack Quick!" hissed Deacon, "and then we'll see who'll get this fortune."

What could he mean?

Jack did not stop to think, for he was in great peril of his life, and it needed all his thoughts to get him out.

The cake of ice, now not more than six feet across, was fast bearing them toward the falls, toward certain death.

There was danger also of its breaking to pieces before it came to the rapids, and this was as great a peril as the other.

Jack's only hope now was to escape from Dan, as he could not expect to take him prisoner, and toward this end he exerted all his energies.

He suddenly threw out his right foot, and with a dexterous turn he threw Dan upon his back.

His head struck the hard ice, and he lay as motionless as though he were dead.

"If I've killed him I can't help it," thought Jack, quickly. "He would have done the same to me."

Then he took a plunge, and when he reached the water he struck out boldly for the shore, hoping to reach the main body of the ice before the current could sweep him down.

It was a desperate chance, but Jack was a good swimmer, and had he not been burdened by his clothes would have had nothing to fear.

He reached one huge mass of ice which seemed fast, but he had hardly crawled upon it and risen to his feet, before it began to move off down stream.

Despair lent him wings, and he fairly flew over the white surface, hoping to reach the in-shore edge before it had got too far out.

In an incredibly short space of time he reached the edge.

Too late!

A chasm, twelve feet in width, yawned before him.

He had escaped from one peril only to fall into another.

He would be carried over the falls after all, despite his every effort.

The thought was well-nigh maddening.

He would plunge again into the icy stream, and brave all its terrors rather than be made a passive victim.

He was about to take the perilous plunge, when he felt a slight shock.

The further end of the cake had struck something, perhaps grounded.

Scurrying over the ice, he saw what had occurred.

A projecting point of land, to which a long tongue of ice was attached, had momentarily stopped the progress of his particular cake.

It began to swing around at this very moment, however, and in another minute would continue on its course.

Upon that minute all his life depended.

Gathering himself up for the effort, his limbs hung numb and stiff, and a fatal drowsiness beginning to steal over him, he made a desperate dash for life.

Crack!

The ice has given away!

Yes, but it is a part of his cake, not that running out from shore.

He reaches this narrow tongue, and rushes across it with the speed of the wind.

Crack!

Again comes that ominous sound, but the disaster has come too late to harm Jack now.

He is upon shore, and for a moment he sinks exhausted.

And Dan Deacon! Has he perished?

No, for with a good luck or a bad luck, it is hard to tell which it is, the cake of ice has struck against a projecting rock, right upon the

very summit of the rapid, and there he clings waiting till help shall come.

For an instant only Jack lies upon the ground, but then he springs to his feet with a wild cry on his lips.

"I must not stay here," he murmurs, "I shall be frozen to death!"

Then he summons all his strength, and hurries over the frozen ground towards the station.

As he runs, his blood begins to warm up again, and his whole frame tingles under the renewal of the circulation.

It is absolutely painful, but the danger is not over yet, and he runs as he never ran before, until, upon at last reaching the station, he falls, all in a heap, upon the platform.

Matt is there, and lifting him up carries him into the waiting-room, and clears out the few inquisitive ones who have followed.

The half hour is not up yet, and while Matt strips off his friend's half-frozen garments, the conductor borrows a suit from one of the brakemen, who has it stowed away in a locker, and Jack's things are put to dry before the furnace.

"Another narrow squeak, Matt," says Jack, when they are at last on the engine, and leaving the town.

"Yes; and the next time you had better take me along with you. Here, stick this in your pocket."

"My revolver! Where did you get it?"

"In your pocket. I cleaned and oiled it for you while we were waiting, for I didn't know when you might need it."

"Thank you, Matt. As you say, there's no knowing nowadays when I may want it."

The occasion was nearer than the lad dreamed of.

After leaving Harrow, which was about midway upon the line, Jack bowled along, making his regular stops until he had passed Marshall's, which would be the last before getting to Preston, and here he was able to rest, sitting back upon his high seat, and talking occasionally to Matt, who, having little to do, sat on the other side of the cab, and softly whistled some tune learned in his old Arab days.

They were rattling along in this way, Matt taking an occasional look at the fires, when Jack suddenly exclaimed:

"Did you hear that?"

"I heard nothing but the wind among the trees."

"I thought I heard a cry of warning, of alarm."

"As we passed?"

"No, but in front of us."

"What should there be to fear? There are no bridges, no gullies, no sharp curves, nothing but a good, straight road."

"And yet——"

"By George! there it is now! I heard it myself!"

"You heard the words 'Stop, for Heaven's sake!' Did you hear that?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"Ahead of us."

"What can it mean?"

Putting his head out of the little window, Jack looked forward, and suddenly cried out:

"Good Heavens, they will be killed!"

What had he seen to cause this exclamation?

The head-light cast a long gleam ahead of the engine, and in this luminous track Jack had seen a strange sight.

Two men engaged in a deadly struggle upon the track, one evidently seeking to pull the other away.

What the first man's intention was it would be hard to say, though he seemed to be trying to reach some point upon the track between him and the approaching engine.

Suddenly Jack uttered a startling cry.

He had recognized the two figures upon the track.

They were Ned Steele and Tracy Tufts fighting desperately, to what end he knew not.

"Stop, Jack! stop!" yelled Ned, "or, if you cannot, shoot this villain. He means to blow up your train!"

CHAPTER XVI.

NED DOES A LITTLE SHADOWING.

TRACY TUFTS, finding that Ned, of whom he had thought to make

an easy victim, had suddenly developed into a dangerous enemy, was enraged beyond measure.

"So he goes back on me, does he?" he hissed. "And I have been fool enough, in my rage, to destroy that which gave me an influence upon him!"

He thought over the matter nearly all night, and in the morning when he arose, he muttered:

"I never would have supposed him capable of turning so completely around. What can have got into him? I don't understand it at all."

Then he proceeded with his dressing, having first taken his customary "eye-opener," to give him nerve for the work of the day.

"Gone back on me, eh? Defied me to my face? Threatened me with exposure? And Grace upholds him? Well, this is a pretty state of affairs."

It needed a second cocktail to bring him into good condition after making these very unpleasant observations.

"Then there remains but one course to follow! Jack Quick must be gotten rid of! If I can't have Ada Steele, he shan't, and that's settled!"

A third cocktail braced him up and put him into complete fighting trim, and now, being faultlessly attired, he was ready for a good breakfast, which was presently brought up to him, for he was a regular epicurean, this heartless young scoundrel, and liked luxury above all things.

"To be the son of Dan Deacon! To owe my income to the success of a gang of forgers and counterfeiters! Well, well, that's too good. However, I don't care where my money comes from, so long as I have a plenty and to spare. The thing that troubles me is how to get rid of Jack Quick."

That was the only thing that bothered him, for he soon got over his rage at finding himself to be the son of the rascally Daniel Steele, the Number Two of Old Mose's strange narrative as told to Jack.

"First I must get rid of him. Next I must stop Ned's opposition, and then get possession of Ada and force her to be my wife. Ah, yes, that's the plan; and now to find the means."

His breakfast seemed to taste better after that, and he did full justice to the cookery of Dan Steele's *chef*, a perfect master of the culinary art.

"I'll fix Jack on the railroad, get Ned off on a false scent, and have the gang collar him; and then, on the pretense of taking her to her brother, get Ada away. That will settle all three, and I'm bound to win."

Then he put on his overcoat, fur-lined and silk-faced, donned the shiniest of spring silk hats, drew on a pair of sealskin gloves, and with a natty stick between his fingers, and a fragrant cigar stuck in one corner of his mouth, started off for a stroll.

He had not gone long before he met Ned, but the latter seemed really glad to see him, and greeted him quite cordially, treating him, in fact, with that deference that in the old days had come so natural.

"Aha!" thought the young villain, "he is coming around again. Perhaps I shall be able to get his assistance after all; perhaps it will not be necessary to shut him up after all."

Ned had not and did not intend to come around, but he had a part to play, and this deference was only a necessary instrument, among others, wherewith to carry out his plans.

The evening before Ned had said to his father, Simon Steele having returned to Preston:

"Dad, did you know that Tracy was Dan Steele's son?"

"Dan's son! No, indeed. He is nobody's—at least, not that, but nobody's that I know of. He is Dan's ward, a sort of *protege* of his."

"Did you know, also, that Jack is not Dan's son, but the son of someone else, of whom I don't know, however?"

"Not Dan's son? Oh, no, that can't be. I am sorry to say that I have discovered, beyond a doubt, that he is."

"Whose son did you think he was? Not your own, surely?"

"No, Ned, not mine. You are my son beyond a doubt, but at times I have had suspicions—oh, well, it can't interest you."

"But it does, dad. It interests me deeply. I like Jack, and I hate to think that he's the son of Dan Steele."

"Well, well, Ned, it may come out all right in the end. However, what you have said sets me to thinking."

"Well, dad?"

"Beware of Tracy, and above all watch him. Keep your eye on

him as much as you can. And above all, Ned, if Dan Deacon turns up, as he may——"

"He has turned up, dad."

"Not dead! Ah, then I must be cautious! You don't know where he is?"

"No, dad."

"If you see or hear of him, let me know. Ned, that villain could deprive me of my fortune if he dared!"

"How so?"

"By producing the son of my cousin, Reginald."

"But he is dead, you have told me."

"I am not sure of it. He has disappeared, certainly, but that he is dead I do not know, and from what you have just told me——"

"Well, dad?"

"I can say no more, Ned. Bear in mind what I told you, and keep a sharp eye upon Tracy."

"I won't let him out of my sight," thought Ned, as he retired.

Left to himself, Simon Steele spent nearly an hour in deep thought, and then mused softly to himself:

"If Reginald's son should appear! Does Dan really know of his existence? Will he dare to present him in the face of the accusation I can make, and which he cannot deny? Aha! that was a good idea, to charge him with the murder, when in reality it was——"

Here he broke off, and as he did not utter his thoughts aloud after that, no one can tell what they might have been.

Ned determined to follow his father's advice, and so on the next day we find him awaiting the appearance of Tracy, whom he meant to follow as a sleuth-hound follows his quarry, and never leave him until he had detected Tracy in some act which would give him a hold upon the young rascal.

He was affability itself, and for awhile Tracy was entirely disarmed, and allowed Ned to accompany him wherever he chose.

At the end of several hours, however, Tracy began to suspect that Ned was following him, and tried to invent some plan of getting rid of him.

"I've got to go to Chesterton, Ned," he said, presently. "You don't care to go, do you?"

"I'll go as far as Harrow with you, old fellow, but I've nothing to take me any further on the road."

"You can go to the devil if you like!" thought Tracy. "You are trying to shadow me, but you won't do it."

Ned then proposed that they should dine somewhere, and another hour was spent in a first-class restaurant, after which they made for the station, where they waited another twenty minutes for an express train.

They were both smoking, and so they took a smoking-car, but after they had gone some distance Tracy arose and declared his intention of taking a seat in a drawing-room car, where he would await Ned's convenience.

Ned agreed to this, not having finished his cigar, but ten minutes later he arose, the train having come to a stop at Marshall's.

As he was passing through the train he saw Tracy hurrying up the street, as if anxious to get out of sight, and never once looking back.

"That's all right," muttered Ned. "I'll get off at the next station and take the train which this meets. He won't have got away by that time. All he wants is to get rid of me."

"I've given him the slip," muttered Tracy, "and to-night I'll fix Jack's train. This is as good a place as any to put the packet, for after leaving Marshall's he won't be so careful, and will run on without looking at the road."

His intention was to place a torpedo upon the track in such a manner that Jack's engine, passing over it, would trip the hammer, which should set it off, and thus blow the engine to pieces, or at least so injure it as to cause Jack's death.

He could do nothing until after dark, however, and he therefore went up to the hotel to await the proper time for his devilish work.

At Marshall's the gang of Dan Deacon had a rendezvous, and here Tracy procured the torpedo, which he hid in the woods, near the spot where he intended to place it on the track.

Ned returned to Marshall's by nightfall, and soon found Tracy, whom he seemed surprised to meet.

Tracy made some excuse for not having gone further, and then the

two spent several hours together, Tracy at last expressing his intention of going to bed, having already engaged his room.

Ned would have liked to occupy the same room, but being small this was impossible, and he was obliged to be contented with one next to it.

He did not go to sleep, and well it was that he did not, for late in the night he heard Tracy leave his room cautiously and go down stairs.

When a sufficient time had elapsed Ned followed, knowing that the young villain had some mischief in his head which he was about to execute.

He followed Tracy at a distance, and at last, when he paused by the railroad track, watched him for some moments from his place of concealment without saying a word.

"There," muttered Tracy, having buried the torpedo in the sand and snow, leaving the stick which was to trip the hammer high enough above the ties to escape the pilot, but be struck by the truck, "when that strikes up goes Jack Quick, and I am done with him forever!"

At that instant Jack's train had left Marshall's, and was now rapidly approaching.

"Villain!" cried Ned, leaping upon him, "what have you done?"

"So you are here, Ned Steele!" hissed Tracy, seizing Ned around the body and trying to drag him from the track. "You are on time, then, to witness the destruction of your friend!"

Ned tried to break away so as to remove the torpedo, while Tracy endeavored to drag him away, that he might not be struck by the approaching engine.

This was now in plain sight, the glare of the head-light throwing their figures into bold relief.

"Stop! stop!" yelled Ned, "or if you cannot, shoot this villain, Jack. He intends to blow up the train!"

Jack heard, and in an instant his revolver was in his fist and a ball went whistling through the air, striking Tracy in the shoulder.

He suddenly released Ned and fell upon the track before the engine, now not more than fifteen feet away.

CHAPTER XVII.

JACK'S NARROW ESCAPE—A NEW SURPRISE.

"Now or never!" muttered Ned, leaping forward.

He reached the spot where the torpedo had been imbedded and pulled away the stick which should trip the hammer and explode the deadly engine of destruction.

Not a moment too soon, though, for the locomotive was upon him.

There was no chance to leap from the track, and so, with the agility of a cat, Ned sprang upon the pilot, seized the standard, and fell forward upon the bumpers as the train rushed on.

And Tracy Tuffis?

He had rolled himself from the track just in the nick of time, and now lay in the ditch, cursing and heaping all sorts of invectives upon Ned's head for having interfered in his hellish work.

"I hope he has been killed!" was his kindly wish as he arose after the train had past, and shook his fist at it.

Jack had seen Ned's success, although for an instant he expected nothing but that the brave fellow would be killed, and quickly leaving his post, he drew Ned inside the cab, placed him upon the seat, and dashed water into his face.

By this time the train had come to a pause.

"What's up, Ned?"

"You are safe! The train isn't blown up. You have entirely passed the place where you saw us fighting."

"We are all right, Ned; but tell me what was the matter?"

Ned related the history of the whole affair, and then Jack went back with a lantern, and Ned showed him the place where the torpedo had been hidden.

There it was, for Tracy in his hurry had not taken it away, having other things more important to think of.

The torpedo was carefully dug up, and put in a safe place in the cab, where the jolting of the engine would not be likely to explode it.

"We want this for evidence," said Jack. "We may find out who made it. The next thing to do is to put the police upon the track of this fellow."

"Do you know who he is?" asked Ned, and then, without waiting for an answer, "he is the son of Dan Deacon."

After they had started out again Ned told Jack all he had learned two days before, part of which was already known to our hero, as the reader is aware.

"Old Mose must have been mistaken in some way, then," murmured Jack; "and this makes it imperative that I should find him at once. Wherever those villains have taken him I must ferret him out. I do not think they mean to kill him, but only to keep him hidden lest he should betray some of their secrets."

The run to Preston was made in good time, and then Ned went directly home, leaving Jack and Matt to go off together.

When Ned reached the house a new surprise awaited him, for he found the house still open, and his father waiting for him in the library, whither he went at once.

"Have you not seen her then, Ned?"

"Seen whom, dad?"

"Your sister Ada."

"No, indeed. Is she not at home?"

"She went away three or four hours ago, while I was out, to go to you, who were reported badly hurt, and has not since returned."

"Do you know where she went?"

"To the station; but no one has seen her there."

"This is some plot of that villain Tracy's, and yet he has scarcely been out of my sight all day," and Ned related his day's adventures.

"I fear Dan Deacon is at the bottom of this."

"But Jack left Dan in the river, and it is not likely that he has escaped, and if so, that he had a hand in this affair."

"He is at the bottom of it, at any rate, Ned, and means to ruin me. Ada must be found at once or it may prove too late."

Although the night was so far advanced, Ned went at once to police headquarters, and had a general alarm sent out, offering a reward for the recovery of his sister and the arrest of the villains who had abducted her, giving such information concerning the different members of Dan's gang as was in his possession, for to them he was confident he owed this fresh outrage.

Then he posted direct to the house where Jack and Matt lived and informed our hero of what had occurred, Jack being terribly indignant and wanting to hunt down the villains that very moment.

There was clearly nothing to be done at that late hour, however, and Jack was forced to wait until morning, though this went greatly against his inclinations, but he finally submitted to the inevitable and did nothing till early morning.

Despite all his efforts and those of the police, no trace of the missing girl could be found that day nor the next, and Jack and his friends were almost wild with excitement.

Tracy Tuffts and Dan had both disappeared, and the gang seemed to have been suddenly swallowed up by the earth, for not a trace of any of them could be found.

Ned went to Grace, but she knew nothing whatever, and all she could promise was to keep him posted and let him know as soon as she discovered anything.

Though bad at heart, the girl had some good qualities, and was perfectly devoted to Ned, whom she was now determined to assist in every possible way.

On the second day after Ned's disappearance Matt came to Jack and said:

"I caught on to a bit o' chinnin' early this morning between a couple o' fellers that I knowed belong to der gang. Dey've got a cellar down in Pine street, under an old chapel, and dat's where dey make de queer."

"Why, that must be the very place that Mose spoke of."

"An' I reckon the young girl is hid away there. Best drop in on 'em, I guess."

"By all means; let's go at once."

The chapel in Pine street stood on a corner, the entrance being in a narrow alley and not on the street itself, and thither the two young men went at once.

The place had a deserted look when they reached it, but a small door at the side was open, and towards this they made their way.

Jack had scarcely passed through, leaving Matt outside, when the

door was closed with a bang, and two pair of stout arms seized the young fellow.

Before he could cry out or speak a gag was thrust into his mouth, and with his arms pinioned close to his side, he was hurried away down a long flight of stone steps, through damp and foul-smelling passages, and at last brought to a sort of cell deep under ground, where he was placed on a stone bench and securely fastened to the wall by means of ropes passed around his chest and secured to iron rings set into the stones on either side of him.

For an instant only he thought that Matt had betrayed him, but then he dismissed the thought as being unworthy both of him and the brave young fireman.

"No, no," he mused; "Matt has done me too many favors, has been too devoted to me to play the traitor. No, it is to someone else that I owe this new disaster."

He was not long left in doubt as to who this was.

He had been in his cell perhaps fifteen minutes when someone entered, bearing a torch.

The light shone upon the man's face, and Jack recognized him.

"Dan Steele!" he cried. "So you escaped the other night after your cold bath?"

"Yes, and that's more than you will do now. I say there!"

This was said to someone outside, and presently a man entered, bringing a new prisoner.

This was none other than Ned Steele!

"I've brought you company," laughed Dan, as Ned was secured to the opposite wall in the same manner as Jack. "I thought you might like to talk to each other a bit before you die!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE PIVOT—AN UNWELCOME VISITOR—THE ESCAPE.

"BEFORE we die!" repeated Ned, aghast. "You surely would not dare——"

But Dan said no more, and now went away, his comrade slamming the door behind him with a heavy sound, and leaving the place in total darkness.

"Well, Ned," said Jack, presently, "we seem to be in a box."

"I don't see how you can be so cheerful about it, Jack."

"Because I've got used to it. This isn't the first time, you know, that I've got into trouble."

"Do you see any way out of it?"

"Not at present, I confess, but perhaps I shall after a little."

"I am afraid that we have but little time to spare, for these men, now that they have got hold of us, will want to finish the job as speedily as possible."

"I know that, but—— Hallo! what's that?"

The young man suddenly felt himself turning around, stone bench and all, and knew not what to make of it.

"I say, Ned, I am turning about——" but then a hand was suddenly placed over his mouth, and the sentence was left unfinished.

"What's that you say, Jack?"

There was no answer, the only sound being a sharp click.

"What's the matter, Jack? Why don't you answer?"

If it had not been so pitch dark in the place Ned would have seen in a moment why his friend did not speak.

"Can he have found a way out?" thought he. "Well, I won't say anything for fear those fellows outside may hear and suspect something."

What had happened to Jack?

A very simple thing.

He had felt the bench upon which he was seated turning around, and with it a section of the wall about two feet in width and as high as his head.

That was just exactly what had happened.

This portion of the cell swung on a pivot, and when the hand, or whatever else it was, was placed over his mouth he had turned a quarter way about.

When he had swung half way round the hand was removed, and he found himself in a cell much lighter than that he had just left.

He had company, too, the outlines of a human form being plainly visible.

"Who is that?" he asked.

"Sh!" said a voice which he thought he recognized, and then the

stranger suddenly threw the place into a blaze of light by turning the key of a gas-burner, set into the wall on one side of the place.

The man was Mose.

"You here!" cried Jack.

"Hush! don't speak so loud, my boy. It was quite by accident that I touched the spring which turned you around. I really did not know it was there."

"Then there is another entrance to this place?"

"Yes."

"Can you get out?"

"I can; wait a bit till I get you free. Bother it, I haven't a knife."

"There is one in my pocket."

Mose lost no time in putting his hand in Jack's pocket and getting out the knife, and in a few minutes the boy was free.

"We must save Ned," he cried.

"Ned Steele? Is he a prisoner, too?"

"Yes."

"Give me your knife, and when I sit on this bench press that knob at the side."

"I see none."

"That round stone there. He, he, that's it! Funny I should have found it."

The old fellow then placed himself on the bench, and Jack touched the spring which sent the thing around, and Mose disappeared.

It seemed an age before the boy heard a rap upon the wall on the other side, but in reality it was but a few minutes.

Pressing the spring once more, the wall swung around again, and on the bench sat Ned Steele.

He sprang off, and throwing his arms about Jack, cried joyfully:

"By, George! old fellow, I did not expect to see you again. This is a mighty lucky thing, isn't it?"

"Yes, yes; but the old man? Is he in there still?"

"Yes, and you're to send this affair after him."

"All right."

And Jack touched the spring.

The bench swung around, and after waiting a reasonable time Jack brought it back.

To his horror it was not old Mose whom he saw, but Dan Deacon!

"Turned up again!" he cried.

"Yes!" and Dan sprang up.

"Seize him, Ned, and force him upon the seat!"

With the strength of desperation young Steele hurled himself upon the villain, and forced him back upon the bench.

Then Jack pressed the spring with all his force, and the bench shot around once more like lightning, the spring shutting into its place with a tremendous click.

"The thing can be controlled only from this side, Ned," cried Jack, "but there is another way out, and we must get off before that man's pals come in again."

"Where is the door?"

"We must find it."

There was light enough in the place to see every corner of it, but there was no sign of a door, look as close as they would.

"There certainly is a way out, for Mose said so."

"Hark!"

"Someone is about to enter. If you see him first, Ned, give the word."

Jack then whipped out his revolver, which he had not been deprived of, and stood ready to force his way out of his prison, despite all resistance.

Suddenly, however, the gas went out, and the place was in black darkness.

"Give me your hand, Ned; we must keep together."

He felt Ned's hand placed in his own, and grasping it firmly, drew the lad toward him.

Suddenly there was a rush of cold air, which struck upon his face and convinced him that a door had been opened somewhere.

It was in front of him, but, as all was dark, he could not determine whence it might be.

"Steady!" he heard someone say in a whisper; "be careful, now."

The sound was directly in front of him!

Without uttering a sound, he suddenly dashed forward, dragging Ned after him, and fired.

The flash revealed an open doorway, and two men standing just inside the room.

One of these fell with a loud cry, and called upon the other to assist him.

Crack!

Jack fired a second shot, and then sprang at the door, still pulling Ned behind.

The second man fell, and then the two boys leaped over the fallen bodies and dashed down a narrow passage.

A sudden turn caused them to run with great violence against the wall, but here they saw a ray of light in the distance, and towards it they ran with all speed, Jack now releasing Ned's hand, as they could make better progress singly than hand in hand.

"Safe at last!" cried Ned.

"Hardly so yet, my boy; but courage! Our troubles are nearly over!"

A few minutes more and they had dashed out into a narrow court, into which a few rays of the sun managed to struggle.

They could see a narrow street at one side of the court, a short lane leading to it, and being, in fact, the only outlet.

They reached this, and sped along it, not caring in what direction they went, for as they left the court they could hear a hubbub behind them, and knew that an alarm had been given.

"I know the reputation of this quarter of the town," said Jack, hastily, waiting till Ned came alongside, "and I know that we would get little sympathy from the inhabitants, if they chose to detain us."

A crowd was already beginning to gather, and redoubling their exertions, the two friends clinched hands and dashed along the narrow street, upsetting more than one ruffian who endeavored to stop them, until they at last emerged into a wide thoroughfare crowded with people, and here they felt at last that they were safe.

CHAPTER XIX.

A FRIGHTFUL LEAP.

FROM here it was not very far to the office of the railroad company, and thither the two boys bent their steps.

They found Mr. Steele and reported what had happened, the railway president promising to put the police on the track of the villains.

"And you saw nothing of Ada, my boys?"

"Nothing, dad."

"Well, I am glad, at all events, that you have escaped, and I cannot thank you too much, Jack, for the help which you gave to Ned. You have placed me deeper than ever in your debt."

"Say no more about it, sir. I am only too happy to serve you in any way, and Ned knows that I would die rather than have any injury befall either him or Ada."

"He's a brave fellow, dad," put in Ned, "and if it hadn't been for him I shouldn't have got away. I don't believe that he can be the son of that——"

Simon Steele turned pale and seemed greatly agitated, and Jack himself put an end to Ned's remarks by saying, with an impatient gesture:

"No more, Ned, as you are my friend. I will not, cannot believe it, but don't let's think of that. It will all come right some time."

"Suppose we improve our appearance a bit by the addition of a couple of hats, and then go up to the house to dinner. Perhaps we'll hear something new."

The two boys went off together and dined at Ned's, but nothing new had been heard regarding Ada, and the boys were forced to the conclusion that the real search had not yet begun.

In the afternoon Jack and Matt went out on the train, leaving Ned in Preston to continue the search.

Guards had been placed at certain suspected places along the road, in order to prevent the placing of any more torpedoes on the track, but there were other dangers to be apprehended which Jack had not foreseen.

It was dark when they passed through Harrow, and as they neared the bridge Jack saw a white light displayed from the top of the draw, which meant that everything was all right.

It was anything but all right, however, as the lad was about to discover.

Tracy Tufts, disappointed at his non-success of the preceding day, had resolved to make sure of his man this time, and, with the assistance of two of his pals, had resolved upon a deed which, for fiendishness, surpassed anything he had yet undertaken.

Since the adventure of the railroad president upon this same bridge a guard had been placed at the Harrow end, a portable house having been erected for his convenience while on duty.

Shortly before the time of the coming of Jack's train Tracy Tufts, disguised in a heavy beard and dressed like a tramp, entered the little house, and sitting down unasked, said:

"Bad night, neighbor."

"I say, my man, you can't sit down here, you know!" cried the bridge-keeper.

"What's the reason I can't? Don't you see me doin' it? What do you say I can't fur when you see very well that I can?"

"Ah, yes. I see that you are perfectly able to sit down, but that isn't the question. You can't do it, I tell you."

"But I tell you that I can, and I am a doin' it."

"Yes, you can, to be sure, but you mustn't."

"Oh, I mustn't, mustn't I? What's to hinder?"

"It's against rules, and, besides, I'm to look after suspicious characters."

"Well, if I stay here I'm under your eyes, ain't I? As long as you see me I can't do any mischief, can I?"

"Well, no, I rather think not."

"That's my opinion, too, and the young rogue produced a bottle from his pocket and took a drink."

"What's that?"

"Gin."

"It looks like water."

"Course it does; it couldn't look like whisky and be gin, could it? What sort of man are you, anyhow?"

"Have you got more'n you want?"

"More'n I want? That's a pretty question to ax a gentleman o' the road! Do ye mean that ye'd like a drop?"

"Exactly."

"Well, it's agin' the rules o' the road to treat strangers, else I'd do it."

Then taking another drink, or appearing to do so, Tracy leaned back on his seat, and in a few minutes was, as far as the man could tell, sound asleep.

"I've a mind to try a drop o' that," he muttered, reaching over and taking up the bottle. "Wonder if it isn't drugged," he added, taking a sniff. "That fellow sleeps like a log."

In proof of this Tracy suddenly rolled from his seat and lay stretched out on the floor, never even winking or showing the slightest sign that he was aware of what had happened.

"What a drunken sot!" he muttered. "I say, I can't have him in here, and if I put him outside he'll freeze to death."

At this juncture one of Dan's pals came along, and looking in at the door, said:

"Seen a rough-looking fellow, kind o' lush, come by this way, pard?"

"Is this him?"

"Why, blow my eyes if it ain't! I say, give us a lift with him, can't you? I've got a waggin over on the road, and we'll put him in it."

"Well, I'll help you, but we must hurry."

"All right, my boy, hurry it is."

The two picked up the seemingly unconscious body, and carried it out and over the track and towards the road.

At the same time a third man suddenly sprang out, and rushing inside turned the bridge so as to leave the draw open.

The thing was managed by levers, and it required but a slight effort, to one who understood it, to throw the bridge open.

The bridge-keeper happened to look back once, but the light on the draw was all right, and he therefore suspected nothing.

The light had been so fixed, while Tracy had kept the man in conversation, that when the draw was open the white side instead of the red would show.

"Hurry up?" cried the man, "the train is coming, and I must be at my post."

"'Tis only a step now to the road."

"I don't care if it's only an inch. Don't you hear the train?"

"Yes, and see it, too," which was the fact.

The train was within one hundred feet of the draw now, and that draw wide open.

"Take care of him yourself," cried the man, and letting his end of the body fall, he turned and started for the track.

In an instant Tracy had sprung to his feet, and in the next the man was sprawling out upon the snow.

"You ain't killed him, have you?" asked Tracy's companion.

"Guess not. I've only stunned him a bit. 'Twasn't a regular slung-shot, but only a little club."

"Make off; here's the train."

Tracy poured some of the liquor he had down the man's throat, and then, sticking the bottle in the poor fellow's pocket, left him lying there on the snow, all unconscious.

Meanwhile Jack, suspecting nothing wrong, had been rattling along, and not until the bridge was almost reached did he see his danger.

He chanced to see a muffled figure hurrying away at the side of the track, and thinking it rather strange, glanced ahead of him.

The blood fairly froze in his veins.

"My God!"

"What's the matter, Jack?" cried Matt, knowing from Jack's tone that something was wrong.

"The draw is open!"

At this Matt took a flying leap, and reaching the hind end of the tender sprang upon the express car.

Jack whistled for all brakes, and did what he could to prevent an accident.

Too late!

He saw at once that he could not stop in season to prevent a catastrophe, and immediately made up his mind for the worst.

To jump would be madness, and to remain on the engine, death.

"Get on the cars, Jack! They may float!"

No sooner thought of than done.

In ten seconds Jack was clinging to the platform of the express car, as engine, tender, and all leaped the brink and plunged headlong into the river!

CHAPTER XX.

ON THE RIVER—IN THE TOILS.

WITH a frightful splashing and hissing the engine plunged head first into the river and sank in an instant.

The tender followed, but the cars became detached after the first shock.

The last two coaches of the train were fortunately left behind upon the bank, though at the very edge.

Three others took the terrible plunge, and upon striking the water became unoccupied.

Owing to their construction these did not sink, but floated on the river, although it was more than likely they would sink in time, when the water should have got inside.

For the present, however, they were floating, and now began to move slowly down the river.

Matt and Jack were together upon the roof of the express car, and as they floated along they were joined by the express messenger, mail clerk, conductor, and two brakemen, who preferred the roof to the wet interior.

"How long ought this thing to float, Jack?" asked the conductor.

"Half an hour; perhaps longer."

"How did you happen to go through the bridge?"

"The draw was open. Somebody must have fixed that light on purpose to deceive, for, seeing that that was all right, I didn't think of danger, and only saw it when it was too late."

"And you think that we may float for half an hour?"

"Yes, unless—— Good Heaven! I forgot that!"

"What?"

"The falls below here. If we go over them we are lost!"

"By Jove! that will settle us, surely."

"Never mind," cried Matt, "we ain't over them yet, and we ain't sure that we will get there."

"I'm not going to stay," remarked one of the brakemen. "I'd rather risk the chance of swimming ashore than be carried over the dam."

With that he leaped into the icy stream and struck out for the nearest shore, being followed successively by all except Jack and Matt.

"I'm going to wait," observed Jack, coolly taking a seat on the roof.

"What's good enough for you will do for me, I reckon," added Matt.

As they drifted along, they could see that many of the passengers in the other two cars had formed buoys of car-doors, seat-cushions, wood-boxes and other materials, and were making their way to shore, comparatively few remaining in the floating coaches.

By the sounds on shore they knew that an alarm had been given, and that aid was being summoned, twinkling lights along the bank indicating the presence of relief parties.

After awhile numerous boats were seen on the river, picking up the floating passengers and releasing those in the cars, but by this time the express car, being lighter than the others, had floated to a considerable distance from the others, and was not noticed.

It had begun to sink a little, and was now in the current, bearing straight toward the falls.

"Why don't you holler to 'em, Jack?"

"The chances are that they won't hear us, and even if they do, I don't think they would dare send a boat after us. It's too risky."

"True enough."

Nothing more was said for some time, the roaring of the waters as they fell over the dam being quite distinct now.

They had passed by the station, passed the place where Jack and Dan Steele had had that singular duel on the ice, and were rapidly nearing the falls.

"Jack?"

"Well, old fellow!"

"If you don't see me again, you'll think of me, won't you?"

"Indeed I will, Matt."

"You've made a man of me, Jack, and I hate to die when I've got such a good lookout ahead, but I'd rather go now than two years ago."

"Courage, Matt."

"Oh, you're right to keep up your pluck, Jack, and I shan't squeal as long as you don't."

"You might save yourself even now by swimming."

"Are you going to try it?"

"No, I shall trust to the car. We may get over all right."

"Then I'll stick to it myself. I shan't leave you now, Jack, on any account."

"We may stick on that ledge of rock where Dan Deacon found himself the other night. He got off safe, and so may we."

"That's so, Jack, but I'm afraid——"

The rest of the sentence was drowned by the noise of the waters.

They were now rapidly nearing the brink, and by the little light there was, Jack saw plainly that there was no chance of their being stopped by the projecting rock.

They would, therefore, be swept over the falls.

This might mean death, or it might mean escape, but the chances were greatly in favor of the former.

"There's no help for us, Jack. Good-by, if I don't see you again."

"Good-by, Matt, and God bless you."

"Think of me, Jack, if you get clear. There's more chance for you than for me, 'cause you've got more to look ahead to than I have."

Then the roar of the waters drowned all sounds, and the half-submerged car glided rapidly toward the brink.

Both boys held on firmly by the brakes, for now the inclination was frightful.

They had already passed the edge of the dam, and in a few seconds more would be swept over.

Crash!

Splash!

Over they went with a rush and a whirl, and striking the waters below dashed the spray high in the air.

The fore part of the car struck upon a sunken rock, and Jack felt himself hurled from his support, and was the next moment flying through space.

Then he felt a sudden chill go all through him, and knew that he was under water.

Lights danced before his eyes, he felt a stinging sensation in his limbs, and a ton's weight seemed to be pressing upon his chest.

He felt that some part of the broken car was pressing him down, and with a desperate effort he leaped toward the surface.

Then he felt himself shooting upward, and in another instant the fresh air was blowing on his face.

He looked around, and found that he was a long distance from the foot of the falls.

Parts of the wrecked car were floating by him, but of his late companion he could see nothing. Climbing upon what seemed to be a portion of the car roof, he called Matt's name several times.

There was no answer but the echo from the woods on the bank.

"Poor fellow!" he murmured. "It has come true, after all, and I shall never see him again."

Then he sank exhausted upon his frail support, and knew no more until he felt it grating against the shore.

He got up, and stepping on land, wrung the water from his dripping clothes, and whipped himself with his arms to get up a circulation, for he was chilled through.

He walked along rapidly until he struck a path, and then seeing a light at some distance ahead, hurried towards it.

There was a house there, and he would receive shelter.

Such was his one thought, and he fairly bounded along the path until he reached the welcome shelter.

He could hear voices within and see the light of a fire, and so, without more ado, he knocked loudly for admittance.

There seemed to be a hurrying of feet inside, and some time elapsing without the door being opened, he knocked again, and also called out that he was wet and cold and needed shelter.

Then the door was opened, and someone bade him enter.

He did so, and instantly the door was slammed behind him, and securely locked and bolted.

"Ha—ha! waltzed right into the trap!" cried a voice.

Jack turned towards the speaker, and uttered a cry of alarm.

Tracy Tufts!

The young rascal was before him, and in company with three or four rough-looking fellows, pals of Dan Deacon.

"This is lucky!" cried one of the men, "for now we have 'em both in our hands—this young feller and the gal as well!"

The girl? Whom could the man mean?

Was Ada a prisoner, then, in this house, and had he discovered her whereabouts only in being taken himself?

He must find out at once.

CHAPTER XXI.

JACK GIVES HIS ENEMIES A DOSE OF PEPPER AND TAKES A FLYING LEAP.

"SHUT up!" cried Tracy, turning upon the man who had spoken.

"Is Ada a prisoner in this place, you young ruffians?" demanded Jack.

"That's none of your business!"

"Isn't it? All right, my young gallows bird, I know all that I wanted to. She is here! I see it in your guilty face."

"Perhaps she is, but you won't have her, for all that."

"Let him alone, young 'un," said one of the men. "He's wet and cold, and when he dries himself you can talk all you want to. Come up to the fire, Jack Quick."

Jack accepted the invitation, and sitting himself upon a chair, threw off his shoes, doffed his wet clothes, and sat in his under-garments in front of the cheerful blaze, which soon sent a genial warmth through his chilled frame.

"Want some grub?" asked the man, throwing Jack's wet clothes over a chair-back, that they might dry better.

"I don't mind," was the answer, for although our hero was a prisoner, he wasn't going to whine and cry about it, but meant to get all he could out of his captors.

The man thereupon placed some food upon the table, which he drew near to where Jack sat, so that he could eat and warm himself at the same time.

"H'm, you don't seem to 've lost your appetite by gettin' in with us," said the man, as Jack began to stow away the provisions.

"No, not a bit, though the sight of that young cub," nodding towards Tracy, "isn't very appetizing. A cup of hot coffee, if you please, and a couple more eggs, not so hard as these. I never did like hard-boiled eggs. They give me indigestion."

"Well, you're a cool 'un," muttered the man, dropping two eggs into a pan of boiling water.

"Yes, though I'm getting warm now. When you get ready to give me that coffee I shall be warmer yet."

"H'm, it might be too hot for yer, bimeby," replied the fellow, pouring out a cup of coffee for the lad.

"It's all the same. I can rub against Tracy's cheek; that's icy enough for anything."

"You young dog!" cried the indignant young scoundrel, turning red, "how dare you—"

"I say, don't let those eggs poach more than three minutes," interrupted Jack, coolly, "and give me some red pepper. It's good for a chilled inside."

Tracy sat back in his corner again, and the man made utterly speechless by Jack's cool effrontery brought the eggs, the young fellow holding them in a corner of the table-cloth while he broke them upon his plate.

"You don't wash your table-linen often enough," he said with a laugh. "If you don't keep things cleaner here, I shan't patronize this eating-house very much."

"Ye're makin' a stunnin' old meal for a man what's got to die afore morning," suggested one of the others, lighting his pipe.

"Oh, well, if it's my last, I might as well get all I can, and if it isn't I shall be so much in. Lively, then, with the red pepper. Ben, the eggs are getting cold."

"Well, I'm blowed."

"Better shut the door tighter then," suggested Jack, "and while you are about it pour me out another cup of coffee and cut me off a slice of ham while I'm buttering this biscuit. It'll save time."

The men could but laugh at the cool way in which Jack took everything, although he must know that his being in their hands must prove fatal to him; but Tracy, on the other hand, was white with rage, and could scarcely contain himself.

"Bring this foolishness to an end," he cried, rising, "and put this young scoundrel out of the way. We've lost time enough already."

"Sit down and take it easy, Tracy, old boy," remarked Jack. "I'm in no hurry, and I don't see why you should be. If you were going to be harged now, as I warrant you will be eventually, you'd want all the time you could get."

"That's a good 'un," muttered the man who was waiting on Jack, and then he winked at the two others, and they went up-stairs to the room overhead.

"Guess I've had enough," said Jack, presently, and turning around he took his clothes, which were now fairly dry, from the chair, and proceeded to put them on.

He did this quite leisurely, making comical remarks the while, as though he had merely dropped in to spend a pleasant evening with his friends, and was not actually in great danger of his life.

His dressing completed, he took up a pipe which one of the outlaws had left on the shelf, filled and lit it, and was soon puffing away as unconcerned as his jailer himself.

Presently he heard a whistle from above, and knew that the fatal hour had come.

Tracy arose with an expectant look upon his face, and the outlaw advanced toward him, smiling cruelly, and with his arms outstretched.

"All right," said Jack, suddenly. "I'll give you all the fun you want, presently."

He suddenly seized the tin box containing the red pepper, the top of which he had already slyly removed while at his repast, and making a rush toward his two opponents, gave the foremost a dose of it right between the eyes.

The man fell to the floor with a howl of rage and pain, the fiery stuff causing the most intense agony.

In another instant he had thrown the box into the fire, and a cloud of pungent smoke flew into Tracy's face, nearly blinding him.

Quick as a wink, Jack let fly with his right fist, and taking Tracy in the eye, knocked him nearly senseless on the hearth, right in front of the fire.

Then catching up the two candles which afforded light to the place, he turned them down, extinguished them, and throwing the room into almost complete darkness, the fire affording all the light there was.

He had taken his bearings before this, and knew just exactly where everything was.

At one dash he reached the door, snatched the key out of the lock, threw it open, dashed out, and locked the ruffians in.

"They'll come to this door first," he muttered, "and by the time they get out, either by the windows or another door, I shall be out of their way."

Then he tore down the path, caring little which way he went, and in a few minutes walked a narrow lane, it could hardly be called a road, along which he flew at full speed.

He could hear the shouts of the men now just emerging from the house, but that did not trouble him, for he knew that they would be uncertain which way he had gone.

"Yell on, my friends," he muttered; "Jack Quick's time has not arrived yet, and don't you flatter yourselves that you've got him, until you see him dead. I outwitted you nicely, my kind-hearted gentlemen."

Suddenly he came to an obstruction which put an end to his farther progress in that direction.

The lane ended all at once, right against a high board fence, which ran in either direction as far as he could see.

There were steep banks on both sides of the lane as well, and to climb them would require a considerable effort.

"Hallo! I'm up a tree, blessed if I'm not," muttered the lad. "I wonder if it would be safe to go the other way."

He suddenly heard and saw that which told him most plainly that it would not be safe.

First, the sound of voices, those of his pursuers.

Then the flash of a dark lantern.

The men were coming right down the very lane and in the same direction he had himself taken.

Then the deep baying of a huge dog and the patter of the animal's feet upon the gravel.

The truth broke upon him in an instant.

The men were tracking him with a blood-hound.

He was lost!

So he thought for an instant only, and then a fierce determination took possession of him.

"It does not mean capture to be hunted by a blood-hound," he murmured between his set teeth. "It means death!"

Then taking a short run towards his pursuers, who were now in sight, he gathered all his faculties together for the last effort, dashed at the fence with full force, flew up it, with hands and feet, reached the top, dropped on the other side, and scudded away like the wind.

He was saved!

CHAPTER XXII.

RECOUNTING JACK'S FURTHER ADVENTURES.

BUT was Jack saved after all?

He had leaped the fence, and was now flying along the bank, but was there not some way by which the villains could reach him?

There was indeed!

It did not take long to tear a board from the fence, and through this the dog made his way, and, catching the scent again, darted after Jack in full cry.

The outlaws soon followed, and the chase was again renewed.

"The river!" thought Jack. "That is my only hope."

It was not far away, for he could see the glimmer of the water in the distance.

"If my revolver was only in good shape I would fear nothing," he murmured, "but my long spell in the water has ruined it for the time, and I must trust to my legs alone."

They were strong and vigorous, but as he took a short turn and made for the river he knew by the sounds that his canine foe was close behind.

There were fences to leap over, buildings to get around and other obstacles to avoid; but keeping the river still in sight, he pressed on, and soon reached a high bank overlooking the water.

At that moment the dog was almost upon him.

Jack's foot struck against a stone weighing many pounds, and it tilted slightly, thus showing that it was not frozen to the ground.

Quickly stooping, he picked up the missile, and raising it above his head, dashed it full into the jaws of the fierce brute, now almost ready to seize him by the leg.

There was an angry bark, a yelp of pain, and then the animal rolled upon his side, writhing in agony.

He was not killed, and might prove a dangerous enemy yet, and

profiting, therefore, by the temporary respite afforded him, Jack sprang into the river and disappeared from sight.

He swam under water as far as he was able, coming to the surface a considerable distance away.

At this moment the ruffians arrived at the edge of the bank.

Crack!

Crack!

Two shots sped after the plucky fellow, one striking the water close to his hand.

He dove again, and when he reappeared he was too far away to run any chance of being shot.

He could see the men on the bank swearing and blaspheming at their disappointment, and with a light laugh he struck out, and soon covered the remaining distance between him and the opposite shore.

He was pretty well exhausted by the time he reached the railroad track, but he kept on in the direction of the next town below Harrow, that being the nearest point which he could strike for in safety.

He had gone, perhaps, half a mile when his strength gave out, and he sank, exhausted and totally unconscious, upon the track between the rails.

If a train should come along now!

Daylight was almost at hand, and an up-train was due in a few minutes.

And as ill luck would have it, Jack had fallen upon the very track along which this train was hurrying.

How long he remained unconscious he knew not, but he was suddenly aroused to himself by an ominous sound.

The baying of the blood-hound?

The shouts of his pursuers again upon his track?

No, neither of these.

The shriek of an engine coming along at full speed!

He raised his head, and saw the dull glare of the head-light staring him in the face.

It was just between daylight and dark, and the light did not show as plainly as it would at night.

It was enough, however, to show him his danger, and yet not enough to allow the engineer to distinguish him lying there upon the track.

It was a moment of deadly peril.

The poor boy tried to raise himself up, but was unable to do so.

He could crawl, however, and he put forth all his efforts to get off the track in season.

There was barely a minute to spare.

He threw himself forward, and suddenly felt himself falling.

Was this a dream?

No, it was a reality.

He had fallen, in very truth, and now the train was rushing right over him.

For all that he was perfectly safe.

Just ahead of him there had been a sort of open drain running across and under the track.

Into this he had fallen, it being about three feet deep.

There was a foot of water at the bottom, but Jack had been wet too many times that night to mind this, and he could think only of the joyful fact that he was saved.

A coal from the engine fell alongside him and went out with a hiss, and then with a roar and a rush, a cloud of smoke, steam and cinders, and a fearful vibration, the train passed just above him and the track was clear.

"Bless my heart!" ejaculated the lad, "that was a close call, and no mistake. I'm getting used to hair-breadth escapes now, however, and I ought not to mind them."

He continued his walk; keeping off the track now, for fear of accidents, and although tired out and ready to drop at any moment, he forced himself to keep on until he reached a station.

There was no one stirring, and the telegraph office was closed, and so, being unable to communicate with his friends, he dropped down behind a pile of freight that had been dropped off by the train which had just gone by, and soon fell asleep.

It was very nearly two hours before he was disturbed, and then the station agent came to remove the freight, and found him lying there.

"I say, young fellow, you can't sleep here, you know," cried he, shaking Jack, whom he did not recognize, being new to the place.

"What's that you say?" asked Jack, rubbing his eyes, but not getting up.

"I say you can't sleep here."

"But I can, for I have been doing it pretty lively. Go away and don't bother me."

"Well, if that ain't cool!" cried the astonished man. "Come, I say, get up out of this," and he gave Jack a kick in the shins.

Jack was now thoroughly awake, and springing up, he took the fellow a left-hander under the ear which sent him sprawling over a box.

"What do you mean by kicking me that way, you big brute?" he demanded.

"Oh, I'm a big brute, am I? Well, Mr. Tramp, I'll just show you what a big brute can do. Hallo, boys, here is a tramp that's got too much lip. Let's teach him a lesson."

At this one or two station-hands came up, and one of them recognized our hero.

"Why, it's Jack Quick!" he said. "Hello, Jack! They've reported you lost in the wreck of last night."

"Well, I'm not, Tom, as you see, though I'm pretty well shaken up. Who is this big fellow that kicked me in the shins?"

"He's the new station agent."

"I should say he was new, if that's another name for fresh; altogether too new, I take it."

"Come, now, young fellow, none of your sass," said the man, "or you'll get bounced, mighty sudden. Stir yourself lively, or I'll give you something to make you."

"Go take a tumble," said Jack, in disgust, "or maybe I'll give you one."

"Oh, you muff!" put in Tom; "don't you know that's Jack Quick, the smartest boy engineer, or man engineer, for that matter, on the road?"

"What's he doing here, then, asleep on the platform?"

"That's my affair," answered Jack. "I say, Tom, have you seen anything of Matt? He was with me last night when we went over the dam together, but I didn't see him after that."

"Matt Briggs?"

"Yes."

"Haven't seen him."

"Let's telegraph."

The office was now open, and Jack sent messages all along the line, inquiring if the young fireman had been seen, but forgetting to say anything about himself.

Presently, however, a message came from Ned, saying that Matt was all right, and asking where Jack was.

"Jerusalem!" exclaimed the lad, "tell him I'm all right. I forgot all about myself in my anxiety for him."

CHAPTER XXIII.

A PASSAGE AT ARMS—MORE SECRETS LET OUT.

THERE was quite a flurry of excitement in Preston.

First, the popular dancer, Grace Grant, of the Varieties, had suddenly left the stage, with no reason whatever as far as people could find out, and had retired to private life.

Not her old life of gayety and dissipation, but real private life, not a soul seeming to know what had become of her.

Ned knew, for it was on his account that Grace had given up her life of frivolity, and had determined upon being an exemplary woman.

Ned, putting at defiance the threats of Tracy, Dan Steele, and men of that stamp, had expressed his intention of declaring his marriage, and declaring that Grace had always been true to him.

Grace would not let him do this until she had proved to the world that she was above its slurs and contempt, and when she could take her place by Ned's side, an honored and esteemed woman.

Simon Steele knew of it, however, and although he honored Ned for his fearless conduct, he could not but feel annoyed and distressed.

"It's lucky that few know the girl as Dan Deacon's daughter," he muttered. "She was wiser than Ned, for she knew that if this marriage was declared, Dan would make all the capital he could out of it. I hope things will be straightened out, but they seem as much in a muddle as ever."

Next Ada Steele, Simon's daughter, had not been found, though the detectives had been working day and night on the case.

Then Jack Quick was reported killed, for the good news which Ned had learned had not yet got around, and many were the expressions of sorrow at the tidings.

It was also known that the train had been wrecked through no fault of Jack's, and men were out upon the track of the villains who had left the bridge open.

Simon Steele went to Harrow the first thing in the morning, although not until he had received a secret visit from his Cousin Daniel.

"I should think you would be afraid to show yourself in town," remarked Simon, as the men entered his sleeping apartment, ushered thence by the footman at Simon's instance.

"I don't suppose you'd give me up," said Daniel.

"I might do so. People have not altogether forgotten the murder of Reginald Steele."

"No, they haven't," hissed Daniel of that name, "nor the conditions under which you now hold the property. If I was sure that I did not kill him, I would defy you, Simon, and pull you from your high position."

"You cannot."

"I can, for I can produce the son of our Cousin Reginald."

"Reginald's son alive!" gasped Simon, turning pale.

"He was yesterday, but I don't know if he is to-day or not."

"You are not going to palm off your own brat as the missing boy."

"Oh, no, Tracy would hardly do to succeed to your millions. He's too fast, and isn't smart enough. Why, your Ned, whom I thought he had right under his thumb, is equal to two of him."

"Then you acknowledge Tracy as your son?"

"Oh, yes, though not to everybody. We understand each other, though, Simon, and I'll let you into a bit of a secret."

"Well?"

"You know that all our boys were young at the time of that affair in the cellar of the old chapel?"

"Yes, yes, but don't talk of that. Go on, man, go on."

"When I and Reginald disappeared, I took his son and claimed him as my own, putting mine away until I wanted him."

"Great Heavens! Then this is how old Mose thought!"

"That Jack Quick was my son? Is that what you mean? I suppose the lad has told you all about the affair?"

"He has."

"Then, as far as you and I are concerned, the cat is out of the bag. Jack Quick is the son of Reginald, and if I choose to turn him against you, I can induce him to take measures which will reduce you to beggary."

"Not so fast, Daniel. You forget a certain accusation."

"I do not, but if I only knew positively that I did not kill Reginald, I would throw you on your back yet."

"But I saw you!"

"You saw me?" hissed Daniel, growing livid.

"Yes."

"You lie. You did not see me. You only say you did."

"There are other witnesses to testify to the same thing."

"To be sure," hissed Daniel, under his breath. "There is old Mose. I must get rid of him now, or I am ruined. He must die, for he knows too much. If I could always keep him in my power, it would be all right, but he may escape."

Then turning to Simon, he said, slowly and impressively:

"I tell you, Simon Steele, that as there is a God, I did not kill Reginald. I won't deny that I meant to do it," and he laughed dryly, "but I do deny that I did do it."

"But I tell you that more than I saw you do it. You were not alone with Reginald that night, now so many years ago."

"Let's cry quits," said Dan, suddenly. "You've got the fortune, I've got the heir."

"You forget that Jack is reported dead."

"False reports are started sometimes, Simon," retorted Dan, and the other winced.

"Well, well, what is your bargain?"

"Let's go halves and I'll say nothing about Jack. If he marries your Ada, you're all right. I can tell you where she is hidden, and I will give her up if you agree to my terms."

"And if not?"

"Then she dies, and I publish the marriage of Grace Grant, the

actress, and daughter of Dan Deacon, to Edward Steele, son of Simon Steele, President of the Northern and Eastern Railroad Company. It would make a fine announcement, wouldn't it?"

Simon Steele flushed, and then said coldly:

"My Ned would have forestalled you in this, had not Grace bade him not to do so."

"Grace forbade him," muttered Dan to himself alone. "That girl can rule me, and what she says I dare not dispute. Confound her! till now she was always forwarding our plans, but now she's gone clear back on us. Grace a good woman and Ned slipped out of our hands! Death and the fiends! the world has turned upside down."

"What else do you propose to do if I refuse to make terms with you as indicated?" asked Simon, after a long pause.

"Declare who the true murderer is, and bring him to punishment."

Not a muscle of Simon Steele's stern face quivered.

"You mean then to put a rope about your own neck and give yourself up?" he asked, calmly.

"Not around mine, but—— I tell you that I did not kill him!"

"And I tell you that you did?" and Simon looked his cousin in the face until he quailed beneath that gaze.

"And I will go to the presiding judge of this district, this very day, if you are obstinate and make a charge."

Dan quailed, for he knew that Simon had great influence with this particular judge.

"Come, come," he said, uneasily. "Can't we come to some agreement? Can't we make terms?"

"I'll tell you mine," coldly, and with an air of inflexibility.

"Well?"

"First give up Ada."

"Well?"

"And old Mose, whom you hold as a prisoner."

"What next?"

"Send Tracy away, go away yourself, and cease to trouble me."

"And if not?"

"You go to the gallows, Tracy to prison, the money is all mine, and you are out of the way. You cannot threaten me, Dan Steele, for I know too much."

"I'll think it over, Simon," said Dan, abjectly, and then with no further parley he left the house.

"He's too many for me," muttered the man, as he walked away.

"Oh, if I could only clear my mind on that one point. Did I or did I not kill Reginald? I had the will to do it, but did I? While this doubt hangs over me I can do nothing. All my plans are turning against me. I'll set the counterfeit mill to going, make a pile and quit the country. Ah, the chapel! That hidden money must be there yet. If I could find that I wouldn't care if Simon did hold on to the rest, for then I'd be rich enough."

And as he hastens away Simon still murmurs to himself:

"I have cowed him, and all that is now needed are a few quick, decisive moves, and the game is in my hands. Aha! did he know what I do, he could laugh me to scorn and hold his own in spite of me!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

ONE OF THE GANG CAPTURED.

JACK lost no time in telegraphing Ned that he was safe, and shortly afterwards Matt arrived from Harrow, where he had stayed after being rescued from the wreck.

"What are you going to do now, Jack?" he asked, when they had exchanged warm greetings.

"Wait, I haven't heard from Mr. Steele yet. Ned tells me he has gone up to Harrow to investigate the matter of the open bridge."

"I've learned something about that myself. It wasn't the keeper's fault. There were three or four men engaged in it, and he says he would recognize the one that came into his place."

"Did you get the description?"

"Yes, but I don't recognize anything except the fellow's hands."

"And they?"

"Well, if they don't belong to that miserable duffer Tuffts, then I'm a liar, that's all! I'm a shoutin', Jack, an' I believe it was him as done the job."

"That makes another item against him, Matt. He may well keep dark, for if he is caught it will go hard with him. I saw him early

this morning in bad company, and I don't doubt that he had a hand in that affair."

Just before noon a message came along the wires saying that if Jack was in town, for him to come at once to Harrow to give his testimony.

Mr. Steele himself sent the message, and Jack at once answered it, saying that he would come by the first train.

An accommodation passed through at noon, and on this were Ned Steele and Superintendent Matthews.

Ned was glad to see his friends again, and the three boys at once filled a couple of seats and began a lively conversation, which promised to last until long after they arrived at their destination, for each had a long story to tell.

They were speeding along the Harrow flats, when suddenly Jack espied a man walking along the side of the track.

It was George.

Without a second thought he sprang up and pulled the bell rope.

"What's the matter?" cried Mr. Matthews.

"That man outside——"

In another moment Jack had reached the door and was on the platform.

Then he leaped off, the train having slackened somewhat, and hurried back.

"What does this mean?" demanded Mr. Matthews, in great surprise.

"Jack may need help. Don't let the train go on," hastily exclaimed Matt, as he hurried after his friend.

Ned was about to follow, when the superintendent detained him.

"Explain this mystery, Ned."

"You saw that man outside?"

"Yes."

"He is one of Dan Deacon's pals."

"Well?"

"He may know something of this affair of last night, and that's why Jack is gone after him."

"Ah, I see, but the boy might have told me."

"He hadn't time, and neither have I for anything more."

With that Ned also left the car and joined the others, the train having now come to a full stop.

"What's up, Mr. Matthews?" asked the conductor, coming up at the same moment.

"You'd better ask Jack, Blake. He'll tell you more than I can. One of Deacon's pals is outside, and he is trying to capture him."

"Good enough! I wish him all possible luck," and the two left the car, followed by two of the brakemen.

When Jack reached the ground the man was not far away, and in an instant the lad was upon him.

"Now, you miserable wretch!" he cried. "You've got to tell all you know."

"Jack Quick! as I'm a sinner," muttered the fellow, turning his head.

"You're right, my friend. I'm always on the lookout for such fellows as you. Surrender, or I'll blow the roof of your head off."

The fellow had no intention of surrendering, however, and he endeavored to get away from his plucky young assailant.

Jack held on tenaciously, and presently Matt came up.

He tripped the fellow dexterously, and in a moment he was on his back, with both the young fellows on top of him.

"Who left that draw open last night?" asked Jack.

"Where are your pals?" added Matt.

"Won't tell," returned the other doggedly.

"Ah, you won't, eh?" and Jack twisted the fellow's right ear.

"We'll see," added Matt, putting the screws on the other, so to speak.

"Ow, ow!" yelled the fellow. "Let me up, you young dogs."

"Not till you tell us what we want to know."

At this moment Ned appeared on the scene.

"Don't know nothin'."

"Give this fellow a kick in the shins, Ned, to make him speak," said Jack, quietly.

Ned obeyed.

The man winced and yelled.

This was a kind of fun that had no fascination for him.

Then two of the brakemen came up and began to dance on his legs.

"Give it to him!" they cried. "We know the sucker."

"Let me up and I'll tell you all about it," howled George.

"Stop!" said Jack.

The pounding and hammering ceased, and the rascal drew a long breath.

"Now, then, Mr. Nobby, tell us what you know, and be quick about it."

"It was me and Jake and Ben what left the bridge open."

"Any one else?"

"That son o' Dan's. He wanted to get even with you."

"Very well. Where are the others now?"

"Jake and Ben have gone to Wilders, and Tracy's skipped to Cherterton."

"Where's Dan?"

"In Preston."

"And old Mose?"

"Same place."

"And Miss Ada Steele—where has she been taken?"

"Donno."

"Honor bright?"

"Hope I may die if I know."

"Let him up, Matt," said Jack, arising. "We'll have to take you along with us, Mr. Nobby, to give evidence."

"You need quiet and retirement after your hard work," added Matt, "and we'll find jest the place you want. They call it the jug sometimes."

George was now taken away and secured in the baggage-car, Mr. Matthews having come to see what was the end of Jack's strange freak, as he thought it.

All hands now re-entered the cars, and the train proceeded to Harrow, where the captured rascal was locked up to await an examination.

Simon Steele was glad to see Jack safe and sound, but said nothing to him of the strange secrets he had but recently learned.

Ned also was kept in the dark, for he would have told Jack, and that would have upset the president's plans.

He was a selfish man, and although he did not mean that any harm should come to Jack, he did not intend that his money should easily slip through his fingers.

He was indebted to the lad in many ways, but for all that he intended to hang on to his fortune as long as he could.

He would see Jack safely married to Ada as soon as possible, and then the truth might come out if it chose.

He did not seem to think that Jack was not the sort of fellow to rob the father of his beloved, for he thought all men as selfish as himself.

There was one trouble, however.

Ada had not been found, and there did not seem to be any prospect of it at present.

"We must go back at once, Ned," said Jack, when George had been locked up, "for I feel that we shall find Ada in Preston."

"If Grace would interest herself," thought Ned, "she would make Dan tell me where my poor sister is kept a prisoner. I must see her and get her to undertake the task. Yes, I must go back indeed."

"If we're going to run our train, we'll have to go back," said Matt, "and precious quick, too."

"I'll have a special one made up in a few moments," said Mr. Steele, "if you will run it, Jack. There's no one else to spare."

"With all my heart, sir. An engine and one car is all I want."

CHAPTER XXV.

IN THE COUNTERFEITERS' DEN.

As the special train moved out from the yard at Harrow, news came from Wilders of the capture of two of Deacon's gang.

Word had been sent to look for them, and it reached the town as soon as they did, Mr. Matthews having telegraphed as soon as he had alighted at Harrow.

The two men were quickly apprehended and thrown into the town jail.

Mr. Steele at once sent word to have them taken, under escort and by Jack's special train, to Preston, where they would be tried.

Jack, therefore, picked up the two rascals and a couple of constables, and proceeded with them to Preston.

He could learn nothing now except that Ada was not in Preston.

but that was something, and once he got upon Dan's track he would learn more.

When Preston was reached, it was close upon the time for Jack and Matt to go out again; but, meantime, word had been sent to find another man to take the out express if Jack desired to remain over.

This was just exactly what Jack did wish, and so that was settled.

Without wasting further time, Jack, Matt, Ned and a party of police proceeded by different ways to the little chapel on Pine street.

"That's the den of these fellows," explained Jack, "and if we alight upon them now, before they get wind of these captures, we shall nab them sure."

The plan was, that Jack and Matt should get in by the side entrance to the chapel, Ned and part of the police party make their way in at the front, and the rest post themselves in the rear, in order to intercept any stragglers.

Although dark, when they arrived at their respective stations, it was not very late, and Jack concluded that it would be well to watch the place for an hour or so, in order to gain more points, if possible.

"The chances are that they will not be at work yet," he remarked, "and we want to catch them at it, so let's mind our eyes and look out for these fellows, and when I give the word, pitch in."

From his place of concealment, Jack saw two or three men, whom he knew to be Dan's partners, go into the place, and of these he made a note.

Even if nothing should come of this night's work, he would have these men spotted, and that would be so much gained.

They could be arrested upon suspicion, and the chances were stronger in favor of their being made to divulge something.

At ten o'clock, when all was quiet, and there had been no one seen to enter the place for fully half an hour, Jack concluded that it was time to get to work.

He therefore gave the signal agreed upon and the operations began.

He and Matt advanced quickly and entered the side door, left partly ajar, though scarcely a ray of light penetrated into the interior.

"Who goes there?" said a husky voice, in a hoarse whisper, when they had taken but two steps within the door.

In an instant Jack had flashed the light of a dark lantern toward the place from whence the sound proceeded.

At the same moment Matt whisked out a loaded revolver, and cocking it quickly, whispered hoarsely:

"Not a word, or you are a dead man!"

A rough-looking, heavily-bearded man stood before them, and just behind him was a door, partly open, beyond which could be seen a flight of steps leading down into the vault below.

The fellow started as the glare of light flashed in his face, and clapped his hand to a small whistle hanging about his neck.

Both boys sprang upon him.

The muzzles of two revolvers were at his head in an instant.

The cold barrels held close to his temples, and he shuddered as he felt their pressure upon his flesh.

Jack gave a low call, and in a moment one of the detectives appeared.

"Go through this fellow and relieve him of anything that may prove dangerous."

A revolver and knife, the whistle and a small, very heavy slung-shot were taken from him, and then Jack said, very decidedly:

"Lead the way now to your den, and remember, that at the first sign of treachery you are unfit for anything except a coroner's jury to wrangle over."

"You've got the drop on me, Jack, this time, and no mistake. I thought you was on your engine. You're allus turnin' up where you ain't wanted."

"Yes, that's a weakness of mine. Tell me, is old Mose in this place?"

"No, he isn't."

"Where, then?"

"In the cemetery."

"Dead, you scoundrel?"

"No, not dead, but hid away in a vault."

"What one?"

"The old Steele vaults—the very old 'un, not the new one that Simon built."

"And Ada—Miss Steele, the young lady—what of her?"

"Donno."

"If you lie to me it will be the worst for you."

"Wish I may die if I know anything about her! Nobody does 'cept Dan, and he won't tell."

"And the young fellow?"

"Donno."

"All right; lead on, and remember what you'll get if you try to come any nonsense over us. I mean business to-night, my man."

"I can see ye does, wuss luck! And as I ain't anxious to skip the golden gutter jest yet, I s'pose I've got to cave. Foller me, and mind the steps, for they're kind o' slimy, and some on 'em's broken in."

The man then led the way, Matt walking by his side, a pistol at his head, and Jack covering him with another from behind, the light of the lantern showing the path before them.

Down they went, and along several passages, Jack taking care to draw a broad, heavy arrow on the walls, indicating the direction they went, with a thick crayon with which he had provided himself for just such a purpose.

Presently, after making several turns, they came to a stout oaken door thickly studded with iron nails, before which the man paused.

"Go and get the others," said Jack to the detective, who had followed them at a little distance. "Stop! Handcuff this fellow, so as to prevent his doing any mischief."

The detective did so, and then went away, Jack and Matt waiting just outside the door.

They could hear the sound of hammering and of shuffling feet from beyond, with occasionally a noise like that of a press, and sometimes a murmur of voices, which convinced Jack that the nefarious work of counterfeiting was at that moment in full operation.

After a short interval the other party appeared, and then, being ready for action, Jack said:

"Is this door fastened?"

"Yes."

"Can you open it?"

"I can have it opened."

"How?"

"By touching that knob in the middle. It'll ring a bell, and then someone 'll come out."

"Do so, then, but mind what I told you before."

"Oh, I'm square now, for I knows what you kin do in the shootin' line. I've seen you do it afore."

The man then pressed upon the knob, the others shading their lanterns and standing just back within the darkness of the passage.

In a moment a tinkling sound was heard from within, and soon after the door was swung partly open.

"Now, then!" hissed Jack, and leaping forward, he sprang through the doorway, overturning the guard, and followed instantly by his companions.

In an instant the whole startling scene of a gang of counterfeitters at work burst upon their astonished gaze.

Furnaces, presses, cutters, and other necessary appliances were there, and the work was progressing at an alarming rate, there being at least a dozen men engaged in it.

Jack recognized many of the gang, but, to his disappointment, he saw neither Dan Deacon, otherwise Steele, nor his hopeful progeny, Tracy.

"Go for them!" he shouted. "Capture the villains in the very act!"

In he dashed, followed by his friends and a squad of police.

All was confusion in a moment.

The counterfeitters leaped to their feet in surprise.

Some sought weapons of defense with which to repel the intruders. Others began looking hastily around for some means of escape.

"Surrender!" cried the police.

"Never!" yelled one of the men.

Seizing a keg of some chemical preparation, used in etching and molding, he dashed it upon the fire in the furnace.

"To the floor!" yelled Jack, falling upon his face.

Boom!

At that moment a terrific explosion took place, which shattered

the furnace and seemed to shake the very foundations of the chapel, the walls beginning to yawn and crack in many places.

"Upon them!" yelled Jack. "The place is still sound and solid."

Then he leaped to his feet, and backed up by Matt, Ned and the officers, he threw himself upon his foes!

CHAPTER XXVI.

OLD ROGER'S HIDDEN THOUSANDS.

A DOOR at the rear of the chamber had been broken down by the force of the explosion, and the shower of heavy iron and steel which had been thrown against it.

Through this door many of the gang now tried to escape.

Some of them had been badly hurt by the flying missiles, not having taken Jack's precaution of falling upon their faces.

Two or three of the officers had also received painful though not necessarily dangerous hurts from the same cause.

Jack, Matt, and Ned were unhurt, however, and they now fell upon the ruffians, and each succeeded in capturing a man.

Those who did make their way outside were headed off by the party in the rear, and not one man of all that had been present succeeded in getting away.

"This place is dangerous," said one of the constables; "the walls above all cracked, and one of the chimneys has fallen down."

"We can't go yet," returned Jack, "or at least I can't. Stay here, Ned and Matt; I want you."

The lamps had been broken, and the place would now have been in darkness, had it not been for the dark lanterns which the boys carried.

There was no immediate danger, although the walls above must fall in eventually, and Jack concluded that there was time enough to do what he had on hand.

The police went away with their prisoners, leaving the three boys alone, and Jack then said:

"Now, boys, we must hunt!"

Both the others supposed, of course, that Ada was the object of his search, but it was not.

Holding his lantern close to the ground, Jack approached the spot where the portable furnace had been standing.

It was now thrown down and shattered, the floor being blackened, and scattered over with broken bits of metal and half-dead coals.

Suddenly Jack uttered an exclamation of surprise.

He had made a strange discovery.

The furnace had been placed, not upon the solid floor, but upon a large slab covering a vault beneath.

This slab had been broken in two by the force of the explosion.

One half had fallen down, leaving an opening in the floor.

It was this which Jack had discovered.

But it was not all.

He had discovered by the light of his lantern, a battered chest lying at the bottom of the vault, which was not more than ten feet deep.

Upon the chest the broken slab had fallen.

It had been battered and broken open by the blow, and Jack saw the gleam of gold.

"Wait a bit, boys," he cried, and then, to their astonishment, he sank right through the stone floor, as it seemed to them.

Jack alighted upon the chest, broke through, and in a moment was ankle deep in gold!

"The hidden treasure!" he cried, "for which one life was sacrificed, and another forever stained with the taint of murder."

There could be no doubt that this was the treasure which the three cousins had sought for, and for which Reginald Steele had lost his life.

Jack tore away the shattered remains of the lid, and upon the inside was nailed a card which bore these words:

"This chest contains one hundred and fifty thousand dollars in gold, and its contents are not mentioned in my will. I trust it may never be found, but if it is, I wish that it may be given to the son of my grandson Reginald. This boy, John, or Jack Steele, will, I trust, do more for the family name than either his father or his cousins. If not, I hope that this money may never be found. ROGER STEELE."

"What does this mean?" Jack asked himself, in a startled whisper.

"His great-grandson Jack? Jack? Why, that's my name! Dan Steele acknowledged it! But this is the son of Reginald! My God, can it be that I—"

"Jimminy! Where did you find all that money, Jack?"

It was Matt who had spoken, and he and Ned now stood gazing down upon him with the utmost astonishment.

"Help me up, boys," replied Jack, reaching out his hands, "and then we must get a bag and take away this gold."

"Is it genuine?" asked Ned.

"Yes, and belongs to old Roger Steele, Cousin Ned. Here, just read this card."

"By Jove, Jack, you're in luck!"

"Me?"

"Yes, for you are the son of my Cousin Reginald."

"No, no, Ned; I am afraid not. Dan Steele is my father."

"He is not, and you can be none other than the missing child of Reginald Steele. I am mighty glad of it, Jack."

"But I can hardly believe it."

"Don't try now, then, and we'll get this money away. Stay here while I go for a stout sack."

Matt congratulated his friend upon his good fortune, for he could not doubt that all this money belonged to Jack and no one else.

Didn't Ned say it was? That was enough, then, and Matt wanted no other assurance.

Half an hour later the three boys had taken the money to a place of safety, covered over the vault again, and separated for the night.

"Now, if we can only find Ada everything will be all right," thought Ned, as he sat before the fire in his own room that night after returning home.

"By George," he muttered, as he suddenly sprang up, "why not go about it now? There's no time like the present."

That snug dressing-gown and those embroidered slippers were off in a moment, and soon after a coat and a pair of warm boots took their places.

"I'll see Grace at once," continued Ned, as he turned down the gas and left the room, "and between us we must find out some thing."

As he stood in the well-lighted hall, putting on his fur-lined overcoat and big gloves, he struck a little call-bell, and presently the footman appeared.

"Thomas," said the young man, as he wrapped a silk muffler about his neck and drew on his sealskin cap, "I am going out, and may not return until morning. If my father returns tell him."

"I am glad to hear you say that, Master Ned, for I know that if you were going off on some wild scrape you wouldn't want the old gentleman to know it."

"I've got past going out for such purposes, Thomas, and you can tell dad that I'm going to try and find Ada, and that I hope to be successful."

"Then may the blessings of the Saints go with you, Master Ned, and bring you good luck indeed."

With this parting good wish ringing in his ears, Ned threw open the door, ran quickly down the steps, and sped away in the darkness upon his errand of relief.

And had Jack gone off to bed, and was he now asleep, while Ned was abroad seeking his lost sister?

Not he. Jack was fully as wide awake as Ned himself.

"Matt," he said to his chum, as they sat together, "there's no time to be lost. I am going to look for old Mose this very night, and after that for Dan Steele. I have a feeling that if we let this night pass in idleness we shall bitterly repent it."

"I'm with you Jack, every trip. Open the throttle, push back the lever, and off we go."

Then both boys prepared themselves for an all-night's job.

"Where's the first place, Jack?" asked Matt, as they left the house.

"The cemetery, the old Steele burial vaults."

"That's a cheerful place to go at night. You've got your pop and glim?"

"Yes, Matt. You haven't got over using slang yet, have you?"

"It seems you understand me, anyhow, so I reckon you could talk it if you liked."

Both laughed at this, and then away they started toward the end of the town, on the road leading to the cemetery.

Neither knew how much depended upon the use of these hours of the night, although both felt it, and as they hurried on in silence, not a word being spoken, they were both impressed with the important nature of the business on hand.

CHAPTER XXVII.

GRACE'S WARNING—JACK AND MATT IN THE CEMETERY.

IN a house outside the city Dan Deacon was hiding this night, having heard of the breaking up of the gang of counterfeiters.

The game seemed slipping from his fingers, and he determined to play his last cards at once, and trust to blind luck to carry him through.

It was quite late, and as he paced up and down the room, where we find him, he frequently muttered to himself as different plans presented themselves to him.

"That will be the best," he murmured. "We will then make sure of one thing."

Suddenly the door was thrown open, and a figure muffled in a long cloak entered.

Throwing the cloak aside, the new-comer was revealed as Grace Grant, Dan's daughter and Ned Steele's wife.

"Father, where is Ada Steele?" she cried impetuously, without further parley. "She must be released at once."

"Who dares say must to me? I'll let ye know I ain't to be bullied, even by my own child. What are ye doing here, Grace, at this time o' night?"

"I have told you, Ada must be released. You can get away, if you like, and I won't interfere. I may even assist you, but that poor girl must be set free."

"I don't know where she is—"

"That's a lie, and you might as well own up. Where is she, I say?"

"In this house," was the answer in dogged tones.

"I thought as much. Show me to her this instant. I have a carriage outside and shall take her away."

"You'll do nothing of the kind."

"Do you dare me, defy me to do as I say?" and Grace drew herself up and advanced upon her father with flashing eyes; "do you oppose me? Then look to yourself, for I swear that I will not be thwarted. I have found your hiding-place, and I can put the police on your track. Take me to this innocent creature at once!"

"Come, come, Grace, don't be too hasty," said Dan, in a conciliatory tone. "I can't give her up, for then Simon will have me in a hole. I must bring him to terms before I give her up. Tracy wants her, and when they are married then her father can have her."

"What! marry that miserable, dissolute brother of mine? Why, I am ashamed to own him even, and have denied him more than once. Marry him! Better die first!"

"It's got to be done; and this very night, too. Did you know that the business had been broken up?"

"Yes; and Jack Quick and his friends are looking for you, to say nothing of the police. Give up this girl and I will help you to escape; refuse, and I'll drag you to justice with my own hands."

"I won't!" thundered Dan, with a fierce imprecation, "and there's an end o't. D'ye think I'm afraid of a woman? Not a bit of it, so take your carriage, as you came, and go home. If you don't, I'll get those who will make you."

Grace turned pale, but it was with anger and not fear, and then, wrapping her cloak around her, she turned towards the door, and as her hand was upon the knob, said, coldly and deliberately:

"Daniel Steele, you have chosen your path, and it is your own fault if it leads to death. You have defied me. You will soon see whether that was wise or not."

Then she left the room, and the dull thud of the closing door was, to Dan's ears, like the sound of clods falling upon his coffin.

"Well, she's gone," he muttered uneasily, "and perhaps I shouldn't have let her go that way. Bah!" he added petulantly. "What do I care for her threats? She's plucky enough to do 'most anything I know, but so am I, and what's more, a match for her any day!"

Perhaps not, Dan Steele, considering the allies which your daughter Grace has enlisted upon her side!

Grace went to her carriage, and after giving the driver a few general directions, entered it and was driven off at a moderate pace.

"What luck, Grace?"

But for the voice one would have supposed the carriage to have no other occupant than the lady, so dark was it, but this was not the case. It was Ned who had spoken, and he sat in a dark corner unobserved, opposite to the seat where Grace had seated herself.

"She is there, and father won't give her up. I have a plan, but we must first find Jack. My father threatens to marry Ada to Tracy, and I am bound to prevent it. I am going to make a desperate move, Ned, and I count upon your assistance if I need it."

"You shall have it, though if you can't get on alone, the task must be a hard one indeed. I thought you were equal to anything."

"I am in a strange dilemma. Ned, I love you and I love Ada, and would do anything for you, but, spite of myself, Ned, spite of the fact that you, my husband, should claim the greater part of my love, I still love my wicked father, and find it hard to strike against him."

"Would he not accede to your wishes?"

"No, and he even defied me, who have always been able to manage him. You must aid me, Ned, lest I should falter in what is my plain duty."

"God bless you, Grace, you're the best woman in the world, and I feel proud of you. No danger of your failing, my girl. It is only the over-confident that do not succeed in contests like this one before us. We shall come out ahead, never fear."

The city clocks were striking the midnight hour as Jack and Matt reached the cemetery gates.

These were closed, and a man stood on guard in front of them.

"We'd better not say anything to him," whispered Matt; "he'd only refuse to believe us or let us in."

"We can climb the wall a few rods further down, just around the bend, in the shade of those trees, without being discovered. I know where the vault is well enough."

They thereupon passed the watchman without saying anything, and it was well they did, as it afterwards proved.

When they had reached the bend in the road, the two boys made their way to the wall and began looking for a suitable place to scale it.

Jack presently found a spot where one of the stones was loose, and, digging away the mortar with the blade of his knife, he soon pulled it out.

This made a niche in which to rest his foot, and he was not long in finding crannies and projections which would greatly assist him.

Matt gave him a start, and in a few moments he had gone so far as to be able to help the latter in turn.

When they had both reached the top, they sprang lightly down and made their way through the trees toward the vault.

They approached it cautiously, not knowing who might be prowling about.

Despite the fact that a guard was placed at the gates, they could not tell whether someone else had effected an entrance like themselves.

They had almost reached the spot sought after, when they suddenly heard voices.

Jack caught Matt by the arm and dragged him to the ground.

"There are two men coming out of the vault!" he whispered.

He was correct, for at that moment the dark outlines of two men appeared barely visible against the white surface of the tomb.

"We'd better go back and fix him," said one.

"Won't he die if he's left shut up there?" queried the second.

"To be sure, if he isn't let out."

"Who's to do that?"

"Well, if that young engineer finds he's here, as he's sure to do, now that the gang is busted up, he will come here the first thing."

"The boss told us to get rid of him, sure enough, but I kind o' hated to kill the old feller right out."

"So did I, for Mose ain't never done me no harm, but it won't do to let him get away."

"They ain't no danger of any one's coming in before morning, and he'll be smothered by that time."

"Tom'll look out for that. It was a good plan to collar the watchman and put our man in his place."

"Ye're right, fur if Jack Quick should come here, Tom'd say it was agin the rules to let any one in afore mornin'."

"Aha, it was well we didn't speak to the watchman," thought Jack, "for then these fellows would have been warned."

"We'd better go back and give him a crack on the head," said one of the men. "Then it'll be sure, and we won't have no more bother."

"All right, you've got the keys, so go ahead."

The two villains disappeared, and presently Jack heard the grating of the heavy iron doors as they were swung open.

"Now, then," he whispered to Matt, "you take one and I the other, and we'll soon settle their cases!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

JACK ARRIVES ON TIME AS USUAL.

TURNING the sides of their lanterns and grasping their revolvers firmly, the boys dashed forward.

They reached the gate of the old vault in a moment and rushed impetuously in.

A startling sight met their gaze.

The old man was on his knees in the middle of the open space, in front of the rows of shelves whereon were the coffins containing the remains of the Steele ancestors.

On either side were the two ruffians with uplifted knives, about to strike the blow which would send him into eternity.

As the glare of the lantern flashed in their faces the men turned and uttered startled exclamations.

Then with a bitter curse one of them attempted to strike.

Crack!

A bullet shattered his wrist and the knife fell clattering to the floor, his arm hanging limp and powerless at his side.

Then the two boys made a dash and grappled with the ruffians. Jack threw his man down, and planting his foot on the fellow's breast, covered the other with his revolver.

"Drop that pistol, or I'll send you into kingdom come in less than a second."

The man threw the pistol into a corner with a dogged reluctance, while an oath sprang to his lips.

"None of that," said Matt. "Here, just slip your wrists into these pretty things."

The pretty things were handcuffs of the newest patterns.

The man seemed inclined to resist, but Jack leveled his revolver, and cried:

"Hesitate but a moment and you are a dead man. We mean business, as you shall find if you try any tricks on us."

The man instantly held out his wrists.

Snap! Click!

He was instantly manacled, and then Jack released the other fellow, and cried, peremptorily:

"Get up, you scoundrel."

The discomfited ruffian arose to his feet, and in an instant he was served like his companion.

Jack then cut the cords which bound the poor old man, and he and Matt helped him to his feet.

"Ah, Jack, you've just come in time to save the old man," cried Mose, in maudlin tones. "Another moment, and—he, he,—he could laugh in this strange place—I'd have been done for. Ye're a good boy, Jack."

"Come, come, we mustn't stay here. Come, let's march these fellows away. Better go out the way we came in."

"Wonder if that pistol-shot was heard?"

"Quite likely, so we haven't any time to lose."

"Then get, you fellows," and Matt shoved them out of the vault. "I'll go ahead, and you'd better follow if you know what's good for you."

"Stop, we must lock up first."

Jack then locked the gate, and putting the key in his pocket, followed after the two ruffians, holding Mose by the arm, for the old man was too weak to walk alone.

"I told ye a funny story once, Jack," began the old fellow, as they hurried on, "a very funny one—he, he—though it wasn't altogether right. I said you were Dan Deacon's son—he, he—but you ain't."

"There's no time to talk about that now, Mose."

"'Twon't take a minute; no, nor a second—he, he; nor the half of it. You ain't Dan's son, but Reginald's. Dan changed the two youngsters, and that's what deceived me."

"Can this be true?"

"True as preachin', and Dan's got the proofs. He told me all about it, but he said it wouldn't do me no good to know it, for he was going to kill me and you, too."

"He will soon be powerless to do any more harm, for to-night we'll see him either a prisoner or a hunted outcast. The counterfeiter's den is broken up."

"And the gold—he, he! Old Roger's gold!" chuckled Mose, nervously. "Is it found? I can tell where it is. I've always knowed where it was, but I wouldn't tell—he, he! I wouldn't, though Dan threatened to kill me."

"You knew where it was all along?"

"Yes, but I wasn't going to let anybody have it, but Reginald's

son, and that's you, Jack. I'll tell you where it is, for it's yours—he, he—all yours, my brave Jack!"

"Where is it?" asked the lad, not wishing to deprive the old fellow of the pleasure of revealing his supposed secret.

With many chuckles and grins, with many pauses for breath, the old man told Jack of the place where the money had been hidden, it being the identical spot where Jack had so strangely found it himself.

"I knew it when they all three went to hunt for it first," he muttered, "but I swore they shouldn't have it, and I was there to scare 'em out of it if they had found the place. Then there came the murder, and they all fled, leaving the place deserted, and nobody knew what had happened for ten years."

"And you still believe that Dan Steele committed the crime?"

"Well, I did think so, but lately I've been mixed on that point—he, he—rather mixed. I did think it was Dan, and I would have sworn so, but now——"

At this moment they reached the wall surrounding the cemetery.

"Over you go!" cried Jack to the two ruffians.

They jumped over and at that moment a noise was heard in the cemetery as though a party of men were hurrying along the paths.

"The alarm has been given," cried Jack; "over with you, Matt, and help me with Mose."

In the meantime the two ruffians, handcuffed as they were, had bolted, preferring their own company to that of the two boys.

"Never mind them now," muttered Jack hurriedly, as he assisted Mose to get down, and then made the descent himself.

The noise within the cemetery had increased by this time, and the two boys not caring to wait to give an explanation of their presence there, and not knowing either whether the men approaching were officers or pals of their late prisoners, hurried off, carrying Mose between them.

The fact of the matter was, as Jack afterwards ascertained, that the watchman had succeeded in escaping, and summoning help had returned to the gate.

The ruffian on duty was captured, and then the whole party hurried to the vault, hoping to catch the others.

They, of course, did not know that Jack and Matt were there, and, hearing their hurrying footsteps, took them for the villains, and so hastened after them.

They were too late, however, and the boys, fearing pursuit, made the best use of their legs, and avoiding the cemetery entrance, struck down a by-lane leading toward the city.

They had gone but a few hundred yards when they saw a carriage approaching, evidently unoccupied, as there were no lamps at the side.

"Halt, driver!" cried Jack. "Do you want a job? Take us into Preston as quick as you can."

In another moment a head was thrust out of the side window, and a voice asked:

"Is that you, Jack?"

"Why, Ned, are you in that carriage? I thought it was empty."

"No; and you are just the fellow I want to see."

CHAPTER XXIX.

A HASTY MARRIAGE AND ITS CONCLUSION.

In a few moments the carriage was driving towards town again, with all our friends inside, and Mose on the box with the driver.

Grace hurriedly explained her plans, and before long they reached the house where she had left Dan Deacon.

Matt remained in the coach, and Grace, throwing her cloak about Jack, led him to the door of the house.

Rapping for admittance, the door was presently opened by a sallow-faced man in seedy black.

"Ah, the parties to the contract," he said. "Come in. I did not expect you so soon. Did you meet Mr. Steele?"

"No."

"He went after you. This lady is the witness, I presume, Miss Grant?"

"Yes."

"Ha, ha!" laughed the man, as they all passed in. "Steele told me he thought you'd come around. Follow me; he will return presently, no doubt."

Then they went into the room where Grace had had that interview with Steele, and the brave girl said, seating herself:

"We must get through with this business at once. Dan Steele has been taken by the police, and the bridegroom came very near being caught in the same trap. Nothing but his disguise saved him."

"Indeed?" returned the astonished man, whom Grace knew at once to be the parson hired by Steele to perform the ceremony.

"Yes; produce the young lady at once."

"And this other gentleman?" indicating Ned.

"Another witness; we need two."

"Ah, to be sure; and it is quite fortunate you brought him, for everyone else has left the place in a fright. Steele has gone for the groom, but, it seems, has been taken."

"Yes, we heard of it, though we did not meet him. Where is the expectant bride?"

"In an adjoining room. But I am afraid she will have to be persuaded even by force to take this step. She has refused to accede at all to our wishes."

"I will convince her!" cried Grace, firmly. "You will have no trouble whatever. Lead me to her immediately. There is no time to be lost."

The two disappeared, and Ned whispered to Jack:

"Be calm, old fellow, and we shall soon be through this trying ordeal. You are armed, I know, and so am I. If force is necessary to make this rascally parson accede to our wishes, we must not scruple to use it."

When Grace was ushered into the room where poor Ada sat weeping, she waved her conductor aside and said imperiously:

"Leave her to me, I will soon convince her of the necessity of this step. Go and prepare for the ceremony."

The man went away, and when the door had closed Grace threw herself at Ada's feet and cried:

"Trust in me, my dear girl, and you shall yet be saved. Jack is just without, and Ned, your brother—my husband."

"Your husband? Why, Ned is not married!"

"He is, then," continued Grace, not heeding the interruption, "and I tell you now, so that you will not be surprised at seeing him or Jack. You must be perfectly cool, or all will be lost. You are going to be married to Jack."

"Not to Tracy?"

"No; he is away, and may return at any moment. Once married to Jack you are safe, and we can defy those villains. You consent?"

"Yes, yes! Take me to dear Jack and Ned. I do not know you, but I feel that you are my friend."

"Haste, then, for time is precious."

Grace then led the trembling girl to the next room, and, although she started upon seeing her brother and Jack, she made no sound.

In a moment Jack had caught her in his arms and held her in a fond embrace.

"She consents," whispered Grace to the minister. "Be quick."

Opening his book, and putting on a musty black silk robe, the man began reading, in a doleful tone, the first passages of the marriage service.

"Hurry!" cried Grace; "get to the questions at once!"

"Do you, sir, take this lady to be your wife—to love, honor and cherish as long as you both shall live?" asked the agitated parson.

"I do," was the answer, in a firm, clear voice.

"And do you, Miss Steele, take this man, Tracy——"

"Say Jack Steele," whispered Grace, "that is his name; he was christened that, though he has been known by another name."

"Do you, miss, take this man, Jack Steele, to be your lawfully wedded husband, and do you promise to love, honor and obey him as long as you both shall live?"

"I do," sobbed Ada, falling into Jack's arms.

"Then with this ring, as a symbol of the union of hearts and hands, I do now pronounce you man and wife; and what God has joined let no man dare to put asunder."

Jack slipped the ring—provided for another and quite a different marriage—upon Ada's finger, and, folding her to his breast, pressed a loving kiss upon her pale forehead.

"The contract!" cried Grace; "they must sign that at once!"

The man filled out a blank which he had placed in his book, and then Grace and Ned signed it, the former blotting and folding it up before the man could see what names had been affixed.

"Good!" cried Ned, as he kissed his darling sister, "and now," turning to the clergyman, "although you are a rascal, you have done one good act to-night, and one that you can't undo. You have married my sister to the very man of all men whom she loved most. Permit me to introduce Jack Steele, otherwise Jack Quick, the boy engineer."

"What? Tricked?" cried the astonished man; "and Daniel Steele permits this?"

"Daniel Steele was too late to prevent it."

At this moment the sound of angry voices was heard outside.

Then the outer door was heard to open and close with a bang, and in an instant Daniel Steele and his degenerate son Tracy bounded into the room.

"What does this mean?" he demanded. "Grace, Jack Steele, Ned! What are these people doing here?" he asked, turning to the parson.

"Too late, Dan Steele!" laughed Grace. "I told you I'd outwit you, and that you would rue your defiance of me."

"You haven't married them?" cried Tracy, turning red.

"Yes, he has!" answered Ned, "and now stand aside, or it will be the worse for you."

"Father, stop them!" cried the excited young rouse, drawing a pistol.

In an instant weapons flashed in the hands of Grace, Ned and Jack, and as Daniel Steele suddenly turned toward the door, upon hearing a noise there, Matt Briggs appeared with two gleaming revolvers pointed at him and Tracy.

"Clear the track!" cried Jack, holding Ada close to him, "or there will be a smash-up!"

The two villains fell back, and the bridal party hurried away, Matt covering their retreat, and following them when they were safe in the coach and had driven off rapidly.

"Good-night!" he cried, scornfully. "Compliments are now in order," and with that he backed out of the door and hurried away after the vanishing coach.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE DEBT TO JUSTICE IS PAID.

The rage of Daniel Steele and his profligate son, when they learned how they had been duped and outwitted, knew no bounds.

"We must get away from here," cried Dan. "How do I know but what that she-devil may put the police on my track? She is capable of it, and threatened to do so."

They accordingly left the house, leaving the minister who had agreed to marry the poor girl perforce to the discomfited Tracy, to go his ways and get over his disappointment as best he might.

"Where are you going?" suddenly asked Tracy, as they hurried on.

"I shall take the early train, go to Chesterton, and thence to the Pacific coast, where I can probably find a steamer."

"You are going to skip?"

"Yes; the game is up, I fear. We have lost the girl, Ned is out of our power, Jack will soon know everything, and if I stay I shall only be denounced and arrested for murder."

"For whose?"

"Reginald Steele's."

"Did you kill him?"

"I don't know. I may have done so, but Simon has got the grip on me, and it's no use to kick. My pals have all left me, and there is no hope but in flight."

"You can skip if you like, but I intend to stay here for the present."

"What can you do?"

"Get even with Jack Quick for having cheated me out of my revenge."

"You'd better give up that idea. He is too powerful for you."

Nothing more was said, and presently they came within sight of the depot.

"Good-by," cried Tracy, suddenly, and then without more ado he struck off at an oblique angle and left the other to go his way alone.

He had gone but a few steps when he saw someone approaching.

The figure passed under a lamp post, and he at once recognized Matt Briggs.

Matt had been dodging him for some time, and he now rapidly came up with him.

"I've got suthin' to say to you, Mr. Tracy Steele," said Matt.

"I haven't got time to bother with fellows like you," retorted the other, hurrying on.

"But I have, and you'd better stop. Where is Dan Steele going?"

"How should I know?"

"I didn't ask you that, and I don't care. I only want to know where he's going."

"I don't know."

"That's a lie," and Matt seized the young scoundrel by the coat collar.

"Let go," snapped he, and shaking off Matt's grasp, he hurried forward.

Matt headed him off, and he suddenly darted down another street and began to run.

He was on the street leading over the tunnel where Jack had had that thrilling adventure two or three weeks before.

Matt started after him, determined to catch him, and before long they came to the railings fencing in the grass-plots over the tunnel.

"Stop!" cried Matt, bounding forward.

To escape being caught Tracy seized the iron pickets and leaped over the fence.

He intended to cross to the other side, cut down a narrow street, and elude his troublesome pursuer in the darkness.

In his haste he had no thought but of escaping.

Not for an instant did he think of the dangerous air-holes.

And yet, in his frantic rush toward the opposite railing, he was hastening directly toward one of them.

Had he gone two feet to the right or left he might have been safe.

Now his path lay directly in line with one of these openings.

He did not see it, did not think of it.

He only thought of getting away from Matt.

Once over the fence he could easily lose his pursuer in the dark maze of streets beyond.

A cloud of smoke poured up through one of the openings a little further down.

A confused rumbling is heard, and clouds of steam rush through the air-holes.

The early morning train for Chesterton has only lately left the station.

At first Matt thinks nothing of this.

Then, as he scales the fence, a terrible thought rushes over him.

He sees Tracy's danger—sees whither he is rushing at headlong speed.

Then he thinks only of saving the young villain.

The idea of capturing him is totally banished.

He must warn him, or it will be too late.

All this happens in the drawing of a breath.

"Stop! stop!" he cries frantically. "Look out! Don't you see where you are going? You will fall!"

Tracy hears the warning, and sees his danger at the same moment.

It is too late!

He tries to stop, trips, utters a piercing shriek, and then plunges head first through the opening.

"My God!" cries Matt, "he will be killed! Bad as he is, I could never wish him such a fate."

The noise below increases, the smoke pours up in a dense cloud, and Matt draws back, choking for breath.

The train has passed on, and in a few moments its whistle at the other end of the tunnel is heard, and then all remains still.

And below—what is there?

The mangled corpse, lying between the rails.

This is all that remains of a young man who has abused his chances, who preferred evil to good, and who has now gone suddenly into another world with all his sins upon his head, unrepentant, unremorseful, relentless and unforgiving.

It is a fearful fate, but who can say it was undeserved?

Upon that very train which has passed over the lifeless body of Tracy Tufts, his own father, Daniel Steele, is hurrying away to parts unknown.

He sits in an obscure corner and hides his face behind the morning newspaper, just issued.

He is disguised, but there is something in that paper which makes him fear that he may be discovered for all that.

The account of the breaking up of the counterfeiters' den is given in full, with the history of his own misdeeds.

He hears that the detectives are on his track and confident of securing him before many hours have passed.

He hears two brakemen discussing the affair, and debating upon his chances of escape.

"I'll give you a straight tip," whispers one. "Dick Bronson, the detective, is on this train watching for Dan. He thinks he may board us somewhere down the road."

"But we don't stop short of Harrow, and he could hardly get as far away as that since last night."

"Yes, he might, for he wasn't there at the bust-up."

"A detective on the train," thought Dan. "I must be cautious."

"How does Bronson know that Dan may get on somewhere along the road?" asked the second brakeman.

"Folks do sometimes, and we always stop at a way-station if there's any one there. If there isn't we go on, and only make our regular stops."

At Wilders Dan suddenly heard the whistle for down brakes.

As the train passed the platform at reduced speed he could see a man closely muffled up standing there in waiting.

At the same time he saw a man near him in the car cast suspicious glances at the stranger.

"The detective!" he muttered. "He suspects this other man. Good!"

He arose as if to get a cup of water from the cooler at the end of the car, and by this time the detective had reached the opposite end.

The stranger got aboard, closely watched by the detective, and took a seat.

The other approached him and asked him a trifling question.

He threw aside his wraps and revealed himself to be one of the directors of the road.

The train had now got under way once more.

The detective, disappointed at finding his suspicions groundless, suddenly noticed that Dan had taken his departure.

"By Jove! I'll bet that was my man after all," he muttered.

Hurrying to the door, he saw Dan Steele hastening away in the darkness.

"Stop!" he cried.

"Not to-night, Mr. Bronson. When you catch Deacon Dan let me know of it!"

"It is he, sure enough," muttered Bronson, pulling the bell-rope.

The train stopped, and he hurried after Dan, who doubled on him around a corner of the station, and got back as the train was starting on again, the conductor meanwhile swearing at the man who had stopped it.

Dan jumped on, and the detective had the chagrin of seeing him slip out of his hands and the train glide away, while he himself remained looking at it.

"Confound it!" he ejaculated. "What an ass I am. Never mind, I'll stop him yet," and with that he went off to arouse a telegraph operator and send a message along to Harrow so as to prevent Dan's escape.

He succeeded after some delay, but this was fatal to his scheme, for when the warning message reached Harrow Dan Deacon had left the train and was nowhere to be found.

He had gone to his friend, Pelig Piper, who was no other than one of his Preston pals, to look for refuge.

He aroused the man and told him what he wanted.

"I'm as bad as you, Dan," was the answer. "This place is watched, and I daren't leave it. I'd like to get one of the officers in here; wouldn't I just drown him in that room of mine? Well, I guess!"

While they were talking there came a rap at the door, which was then forced open and a party of six men entered.

"There he is!" said one, pointing to Dan. "I reckoned we'd catch him here."

There was a rush, and Dan drew his revolver and tried to escape. Crack!

The pistol was aimed at the leader's head, and in a second the bullet would have gone crashing through his brain had not a comrade suddenly dashed the weapon inward.

Dan received the charge himself, and fell lifeless to the floor, his career of crime ended at last.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A REVELATION AND A PROMISE—CONCLUSION.

It was in the forenoon, just subsequent to the events described in the last few chapters.

Jack, Ned, Matt, Ada and Grace were seated in the drawing-room at Simon Steele's talking over the exciting events of the night.

Ned had acknowledged Grace as his wife to all his friends, and the cordial welcome which they gave her made him feel that after all he had acted wisely.

Mr. Steele, returned from Harrow, had assured the young lady that, despite her father's crimes, she herself was welcome, for whatever had been her faults she had more than atoned for them by her brave conduct of this night just passed.

Matt had come in, and had whispered a few words to Jack and slipped something into his hand, when Mr. Steele called to our hero and said, quietly:

"Will you step into the library, Jack? I have a matter of the first importance to speak of."

Jack followed the railroad president, who closed and locked the library door, motioned Jack to a seat, took one himself, and said:

"Jack, you are my daughter Ada's husband. I am glad of that, for, you know, I always favored your suit."

"I am pleased to hear you say that, sir."

"Do you know who you are, Jack?"

"The son of Reginald Steele, they tell me, sir."

"True; though I did not know that at first."

Then, after a long pause, he said:

"Do you know the provisions of old Roger Steele's will?"

"I care nothing for them," returned the lad, quickly, "for as the hidden money which we found last night proves to be mine, that is sufficient. I waive my claim to the other in favor of Ned."

"You are very kind, Jack; but there is something else."

"Indeed!"

"You have heard that my cousin Reginald—your father—was murdered in the old chapel?"

"Yes," answered Jack, with a shudder. "The murderer has been——"

"Who committed that murder, Jack?"

"Daniel Steele is supposed to have."

"It was not he, it was——"

"Not old Mose, surely?"

"No."

"Who, then?"

"It was I!"

"You? Mr. Steele, you're excited; you cannot be serious; you must be mis——"

"No—no, Jack. I am coolness itself. It was I, indeed, who struck the fatal blow."

Jack bowed his head in his hands, and tried hard to restrain his emotion.

He could not bear to think that the father of his wife, the man whom he had grown to so greatly love and respect, could have committed such a hideous offense.

It was entirely like Dan to do it; but no one would ever suspect the respected Simon Steele of being a murderer.

He could scarcely believe the evidence of his senses.

"Say that it is not so," he suddenly cried, lifting his eyes to those of the man opposite. "Say that you only wished to try me—deny this horrible accusation."

"I cannot!"

"Then," returned Jack, slowly, "tell no man else what you have told me this moment. Let your dreadful secret sink into oblivion. Trust me, I shall never let it pass my lips."

"I have told you this, Jack, not because I cared whether you told it to the world or not, but in justice to another."

"Go on."

"Will you let me tell it as it happened, as I remember it, as it always will remain, fixed upon my mind?"

"If you wish."

"We three went to the cellar of the old chapel to find the hidden gold, neither of us knowing that the others were there."

"I have heard that part of the story, sir."

"Then hear the end. I had a knife, and, being discovered, determined to rid myself of my cousin and secure the money."

"Daniel evidently had the same intention, for he rushed upon Reginald with a dagger."

"Thrusting my arm under his, I struck the fatal blow."

"The knife sank to the hilt, and remained buried between the ribs in your father's heart."

"Dan, inflamed with drink and mad with passion, beheld his intended victim fall, and thought that he had killed him."

"It was not he, but myself, who did the horrid deed, but knowing his belief, I made him think that I had seen him murder his cousin."

"Mose was ready to swear that Daniel Steele was the murderer," thought Jack.

"This was not until many years afterwards," continued Steele, "for we fled, the place remained closed, being thought haunted, and for ten years no one knew what had become of the two cousins."

"Roger Steele died and I took the property, and have held it ever since. When Dan appeared once more I threatened him with exposure, and having committed other crimes, he did not care to be known."

"I have thought you to be Dan's son, but I have since learned how he changed the two boys, all of us being deceived by the trick."

"I have told you all, Jack, and now, having made reparation, leave you all my fortune, which is rightly yours, and thus end my miserable existence."

As he finished he drew a sharp knife from his inside pocket, and attempted to plunge it into his heart.

Quick as a flash Jack seized the rash man's arm, and drawing the knife from his fingers, threw it on the floor.

"What would you do?" he cried.

"Put an end to my worthless life."

"And sadden the lives of your loving children?"

"They would hate me when they discovered my crime, as they must eventually."

"Not so. Daniel Steele is dead, and no one else can accuse you."

"Dan Steele dead?"

"Yes; Matt has just brought me the news, together with the papers which prove me to be the son of Reginald Steele."

"Dan dead?" repeated Simon, in a dazed way. "Then no one can accuse me. He will be thought guilty of the murder, and my reputation is safe. Why did I not know of this before?"

"Mr. Steele," said Jack, quietly, "I have never known my father, and it would therefore be hardly likely that at this late day I should feel sorrow for his death, or vengeance towards his—his——"

"Say it, Jack—his murderer!"

"Towards the man who killed him, although I can feel a certain horror towards this man."

"You will despise me, Jack, and that will be worse than if you had allowed me to carry out my intentions."

"No, for unless I told them why you had killed yourself, Ned and Ada would not believe my explanation. If I did tell them they would have been broken-hearted. They must never know what you have told me."

"No, no, they must not."

"I shall never breathe a word of what you have to-day told me. Your secret is safe. Live, and henceforth endeavor by every means in your power to atone for the wrong you have done."

"I will, Jack; indeed I will," and the man's voice was broken and husky, his limbs quivered, the tears ran down his pale cheeks, and his haggard looks well-betokened the remorse he felt.

"Compose yourself, my father—for you are my father now, sir—and presently you can join us. Believe me, the tomb is not more silent than I shall be."

"Thanks, Jack, a thousand thanks. I have been a changed man since I knew you. I do not fear that your voice will be raised in accusation, but the voice of conscience—Ah! Jack, I shall never be able to still that."

Jack made no reply, but taking the man's hand, pressed it warmly and then, unlocking the door, left the room.

There was a grand wedding, for although Jack and Ada were already married, the hasty ceremony which had been performed the previous night was not deemed sufficient, considering the proud eminence which Jack had suddenly been raised, and another was appointed for a month from that day.

Ned was best man, and looked handsomer than ever, his face no longer being without that look of wildness and dissipation which it wore when the reader first made his acquaintance.

Ada looked charming, of course, and all the young ladies agreed that Jack was "too handsome for anything" as he stood before the assembled guests and vowed in a full, clear voice to be true to his dear wife as long as life lasted.

Simon Steele's face seemed to bear the impress of some great sorrow for some years after that, though what it was no one could tell, as he was apparently in the enjoyment of everything that could bring happiness.

Even Ned and Ada noticed it, but Jack held his peace, and the poor man, punished a thousand times worse than the law could have punished him, went to his grave without ever having opened his lips upon the matter since the day when he had given Jack his confidence.

Ned, with new impulses and better aspirations, continued in the good path from which he had strayed for a time, and to-day there was not a man in the whole West who is more respected than Judge Edward Steele—for he has been on the bench now for many years—a more loving and devoted wife than Grace, one of the leaders of the world of society and fashion.

Old Mose is dead, but from the time of his rescue from the State vaults to the day when he gave up the ghost, he was a changed man.

No rum, no questionable dealings, no shady associates—he had done with them all, and meant to reform, and did.

Jack Steele is now the president of the Northern and Eastern Railway Company, and has doubled his fortune four or five times since that night in the old chapel.

Matt, or as he is now called, Mr. Matthew Briggs, is general superintendent of the road, and a more efficient or conscientious person it would be difficult to find.

To me alone has Jack told many things which have appeared in these pages, but as the names of places and persons have all been changed, and as many are now dead, there is little chance that the history will be detected under the narrative of the adventures of our hero—of whom we now take kindly leave—JACK QUICK, THE ENGINEER.

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